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MENA WRITING STUDIES JOURNAL: MISSION STATEMENT

MENA Writing Studies Journal is an open-access, refereed, English-medium journal publishing research about the teaching of writing, composition, and rhetoric in the Middle East and North Africa. The journal's goal is to share the experiences and voices of instructors and scholars whose work and research is relevant to the region while also reflecting the diversity and complexity of the region itself, as it traverses geographical, linguistic, and national borders. The journal provides a space for theoretical and pedagogical discussions among those teaching writing in the MENA, working with students from the MENA, or in some way associated with the MENA.

We focus on “writing studies” in the broad sense, as people across the region come to the work of writing and writing coursework from many different entry points and institutional backgrounds. Though the medium of the journal is English, we welcome research conducted in any language context. We know writing to be a socially constructed act, and the sharing of how we and our students come to the work of writing will reinforce the rich contexts of our writing programs and diverse processes of our students. *MENA Writing Studies Journal* also aims to build a network of regional faculty and organizations dedicated to writing studies pedagogies, acknowledging the complexities of diaspora and diversity, and transnational and translingual writing practices.

We are open to publishing a wide range of research fitting into “writing studies.” Topics of interest include, but are not limited to, translingualism, transnationalism, literacy studies, technology mediation, writing center work, writing program administration, WAC/WID, assessment and placement, writing and the community, and processes and production.

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MENA WRITING STUDIES JOURNAL

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Editors' Introduction

Dorota Fleszar, Sarah Elcheikhali, Marwa Mehio, Halle M. Neiderman, and Amy Zenger

It has been a year since our inaugural issue was published, and *the MENA Writing Studies Journal* began to make itself globally visible through the scholarship we publish and presentations at the 2025 Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the 2026 Research in Editing and Publishing (REAP) and, pending acceptance, the 2027 Publishing and Presenting Research Internationally: Issues for Speakers of English as an Additional Language (PRISEAL). The journal's movement and acceptance into these international organizations demonstrates a growing recognition by scholars that the writing studies research from and about the MENA is relevant, adds to, and raises important questions about the discipline.

In the process, we understood that sustained presence includes engaging with our community and caring about them as deeply as we care about this interdisciplinary thing called writing studies. One does not exist without the other. We meet prospective authors for Q/A sessions about publishing with us and offer authors individual guidance as they revise their manuscripts. We have created a MENA writing studies listserv to ease communication, are developing a map to visualize where we are physically located and what we do. We have approached 2025 Middle East North Africa Writing Center Alliance (MENAWCA) and 2026 Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (ETLHE) organizing committees with an offer to publish conference proceedings, and our guest editors, Anita Moutchoyan and Malakeh Raif Khoury respectively, are now hard at work preparing the two special issues to be published in summer and fall this year. This Volume could not have been completed without the AUB graphic design students, who are responsible for the new branding of the *MENA Writing Studies Journal*, and NYUAD Interactive Media and Visual Arts student, Batool Al Tameemi, whose photography is featured on the cover.

As we engage with these initiatives and projects, we have come to recognize that *MENA Writing Studies Journal* has moved beyond being an outlet for publication to become a facilitator of research and network building in writing studies regionally. We curate and sustain conversations about our local priorities and concerns, act as a conduit for informing our pedagogies, and offer space to articulate theories in ways that speak to our audiences. We also record and celebrate the MENA's past and ongoing initiatives in our series of interviews with project creators and administrators.

In the last year, we were excited to receive emails of support from past faculty who were at the ground levels of their campus writing community and folks outside of the region planning to use our content for their own classes. Your words of encouragement (you know who you are!) were especially important in the last few months, when war reminded us yet again about one constant feature of transnational university work, especially in writing studies, and namely – that everyone is mobile. February of 2026 made that feature clearer or exacerbated it as universities in the Gulf mandated students move off campus, faculty and students in Lebanon traveled to where they felt most safe, thousands were displaced, and education was forced into online spaces at the mercy of intermittent Internet connectivity, and the region mobilized itself for economic and violent impacts. Student and faculty mobility, which under "normal" circumstances is guided by curiosity rather than fear, may be

a catalyst for development in the face of change or may signal violent rupture. Such mobility thus connotes surface-deep engagement, uncertainty, and discontinuity.

Today, as the white phosphorus is settling on the olive trees, our departments will soon be notified of faculty, staff, and students who are choosing not to return, have no homes to return to, and in some cases have found their final resting place, and we will have to embark on a new round of hiring to replace those we've lost. Trying to recognize the enormity of pain and difficulty that complicates our educational and scientific missions, we issued a new call for submissions that allows our community to start making sense of what it means to be an academic in times of war. *When Mars Attacks*, our third special issue, which is now accepting proposals, is uniquely responsive to the realities on the battered Middle Eastern ground. As we welcome each submission, we think about keeping the community together and recognize our responsibility to record the violence so our community's struggles are not forgotten.

The current issue, however, looks back at easier times in which mobility and imagined linguistic standards are occasions for happier reflections. And here again, as we carve out the space for making science and practices on our own terms, we do not wish to other ourselves from the global conversations; on the contrary, as this issue continues to illustrate, we emerge from the liminality of periphery and claim our right to participate in the ongoing conversations.

In "Centering MENA Writing Scholarship within U.S. Transnational Frameworks," co-authored by Saurabh Anand, Erin Zimmerman, Marwa Mehio, Maya Akiki, and Jennifer Nish, Anand reflects on his first years of teaching composition in the U.S. and credits research originating from MENA with pedagogical support that helped him guide students in meeting the demands of the U.S. academic English while also "bringing their own linguistic resources into the classroom." Based on interviews with four teachers, scholars, and writing administrators with experiences in the Middle East, Anand traces how U.S.-based educators can engage in more ethical and contextually adequate writing center, classroom, and scholarly practices. This can be achieved by critically interrogating the application of western standards to non-U.S. contexts (Zimmerman), recognizing transnational and translingual spaces as postcolonial landscapes (Mehio and Akiki), and acknowledging the need for contextually relevant lived experiences in constructing theories that guide institutional practices (Nish).

In "I was interested in learning English but not study it: Two case studies of Saudi Arabian developmental college writers," Soha Youssef examines how two international student writers reflect on their writing abilities in their first term at a university in the United States. Youssef's study utilizes metacognitive interventions employing cover letters, which asks students to identify their own success and struggles with the English language. Youssef finds that, through metacognitive reflection, students increase critical examination of their writing and their desire to learn language, which has the potential to increase rhetorical grammar competency in the multilingual classroom.

Next, we invite you to our first book review. Neiderman's review of Lisa Arnold's *An Imagined America: Language, Literacy, Identity, and Coloniality at Syrian Protestant College, 1866–1920* begins by comparing the rhetoric and memes surrounding Colin Kaepernick's protest against police brutality—widely criticized across media for “protesting the wrong way” in America—with Arnold's representation of the first student protest in the Arab region, which she reveals received a similar backlash from American university administrators and the public. Neiderman demonstrates that this idea of a “right” way to protest forms a recurring thread throughout Arnold's text which shows how “America” was constructed, taught, and contested at the Syrian Protestant College between 1866 and 1920. In particular, how the teaching of writing and composition helped produce an imagined America closely tied to colonial power and systems of knowledge. As Arnold's text invites readers to consider the identity aspirations of multilingual students, Neiderman calls on regional writing instructors to critically examine—and potentially undo or rethink—the colonial project embedded in Composition/English writing education.

Finally, in “Perceptions and Positions of Postcolonial Englishes: An Interview with Aieshah Arif and Sweta Kumari,” Mehio invites Arif and Kumari to a conversation about English as a site of tension in forming academic, hierarchized identities. In a rich interview, they detail how their respective experiences with English as speakers from Singapore, India, and Pakistan and as university professors in the New York University in Abu Dhabi fueled the Project's material, conceptual, and pedagogical development. As authors acknowledge material institutional support that enables such initiatives and note high levels of interest and readiness among students and faculty alike to question and revise existing practices surrounding their perceptions of Englishes, they also frame such critical work as labor largely unseen and at risk of forgetting.

Centering MENA Writing Scholarship within U.S. Transnational Frameworks

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Marwa Mehio

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Maya Akiki

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ABSTRACT

MENA writing scholars have contributed significantly to multilingual, transnational, and decolonial writing studies by foregrounding indigenous and locale-based pedagogies that sustain multilingual writing. Learning from MENA writing program spaces can help US writing communities reaffirm international student writers' transnational linguistic and cultural literacies while magnifying their historical trajectories of language education. Such inquiry can bridge global North/South writing pedagogies by centering Global South epistemologies. Through interviews with four writing scholars who have been working in MENA-based writing contexts, this interview project explores previous writing initiatives, identifies current gaps, and examines how researchers analyze cultural, social, political, and historical MENA writing traditions. The reflections after each interview response aim to inform multilingual tutoring and teaching practices in US writing centers by recognizing postcolonial locales as valid and subaltern sources of knowledge. Drawing on interactions with regional scholars, the project highlights the urgency for US writing studies to adapt teaching strategies from multilingual MENA contexts. This collaborative work aims to debunk the monolingual Western writing rhetorical dominance and positioning MENA-inclusive pedagogies as central to reimagining global writing scholarship.

Keywords: transnational writing center, transnational writing program, translanguaging, multilingual, Lebanon

Although often underacknowledged in dominant Euro-American scholarship, transnational and translanguaging writing research emerging from the MENA region has made significant contributions to discussions on global language and writing pedagogy and assessment (McCallum & Coombe, 2020; Zenger, 2018). Such studies have further complicated monolingual administrative and instructional paradigms (Donahue, 2023), highlighting the importance of locally situated approaches to writing instruction. These and other contemporary studies have also revealed alternative models of assessment rooted in multilingual realities (Benraiss et al., 2025). Such efforts reflect a broader trend: transnational and translanguaging writing scholarship from the MENA region has meaningfully engaged global discussions on pedagogy and assessment, challenging the presumed universality of Euro-American frameworks (Azaz & Trentman, 2024). I draw support for this claim from my experience of multilingual writing teaching. In 2018, when I first began teaching writing in the U.S. as an international student from India, I noticed my students often struggling to navigate expectations for

academic U.S. English while also bringing their own linguistic resources into the classroom. For example, in one writing session, a student attempted to translate an idea from Arabic into English and hesitated to use certain expressions, fearing they might be “wrong.” In such teaching scenarios, I drew on my own experiences with linguistic diversity in India, a country shaped by deep multilingualism and complex linguistic hierarchies, and I was able to support my student in valuing their original expression while refining it for the classroom context. This experience illustrates how my positionality and teaching approach are shaped by both my personal journey and the broader complexities of multilingual education. As I navigated these intersections of language, identity, and pedagogy, I often referred to MENA writing pedagogy and language ecology scholarship (see also, Mahboob & Elyas, 2014; Raja & Zahid, 2013) because in the educational context I come from, writing pedagogy was budding. I realized that while the U.S. writing/composition studies and their initiatives often present themselves as global models to aspire to, positioning their approaches as exemplary rather than seeking reciprocal exchange (Donahue, 2023), the MENA region offers valuable insights into supporting the writing needs of multilingual and multiethnic students.

Additionally, although scholars such as Franklin et al. (2023) repeatedly emphasize the importance of transnational sensemaking in college education, relatively little research attention is given to how the U.S. can learn from other intrinsically multilingual contexts. One example of such a context is the MENA region, home to a diverse group of writers who grew up speaking multiple languages across social contexts. Centering and exploring teaching methods and understanding the intricate writing context influenced by the linguistic and cultural practices of the MENA region can help writing teachers in the U.S. learn about MENA writers in their classrooms. This knowledge can enable U.S. teachers and tutors to provide adequate support for other global multilingual writers. It is with these assumptions that I interviewed four writing scholars from the field of MENA writing studies. The interviewees draw on their experiences within MENA writing studies to show how these experiences enabled them to challenge dominant monolingual epistemologies within rhetoric and composition studies. For example, most illustrate how working in multilingual, regionally grounded MENA contexts offered alternative ways of understanding a place and its interaction with writing, language, and pedagogy by going beyond standardized and/or English-only norms and countering persistent U.S. epistemologies. This piece attempts to reaffirm the MENA writing studies context as interventionist (Bou Ayash, 2019). Bou Ayash’s work (2019) is interventionist in that it challenges dominant monolingual and Eurocentric frameworks while foregrounding the sociopolitical and linguistic complexities of the MENA region. Drawing on ethnographic research, she examines the linguistic politics that sustain the status quo and disrupt prevailing writing norms by advancing localized, multilingual epistemologies grounded in specific sites. Importantly, this intervention extends beyond the MENA context and invites reconsideration of writing practices in the U.S., which is a central concern of this article. My own experience working as a tutor and teacher across languages in India, alongside my current position as a global Anglophone writer and researcher in U.S.-based writing center contexts, has made visible the constraints of English-only pedagogies and conventions. These experiences, particularly encounters with multilingual writers whose rhetorical practices exceeded institutional expectations, led me to engage more deeply with scholarship

emerging from the MENA region, including Bou Ayash's work. While both South Asia and the MENA region can be understood as part of the Global South, I caution against collapsing them into a singular framework. Each context is shaped by distinct linguistic histories, colonial trajectories, and local knowledge systems, and therefore offers different, though equally critical, perspectives on resisting monolingualism and Eurocentric epistemologies.

Here, I briefly describe the process of compiling this piece. Upon locating the call for submissions themed "On Our Own Terms" (the first issue), I reflected on the contribution of the MENA writing scholarship in my professional and personal writing trajectory. This activity involved reviewing the archives of my teaching materials and revisiting scholarship from the fields of MENA writing, language, and literature that inspired me to create those materials. Later, using Google Scholar, I reviewed the latest open-access scholarship in writing center studies and writing studies in the MENA region, including book reviews, resource reviews, and scholarly publications. This process guided me to the current MENA writing conversation, intersecting with culturally sustaining, community-engaged, feminist, and class-conscious language ideology pedagogies, and led me to my first interviewee. I connected with other colleagues through networking and reading each person's work before contacting them. Here is a brief introduction to each interviewee:

- Erin Zimmerman | former American University of Beirut (AUB) Assistant Professor and Director of the Writing Center and Writing in the Disciplines Program | MENA Region Engagement: 5 years (Teaching, Writing Center Administration, and WPA)
- Marwa Mehio | former AUB Writing Instructor; current New York University Abu Dhabi Writing Instructor | MENA Region Engagement: 14 years (Teaching, Writing Center Work, and Research)
- Maya Akiki | Writing Center Coordinator & Instructor, Lebanese American University | MENA Region Engagement: 20+ years (Teaching, WPA, Workshop facilitating, Fulbright Scholar)
- Jennifer Nish | former AUB Assistant Professor | MENA Region Engagement: 4 years (WPA, Teaching, and Research)

I modeled my interview questions on the methodological and genre approach used by KC et al. (2023).

Main question

As an expert in writing pedagogy and someone who has engaged with MENA writing programs and writing centers, how have you nurtured multilingual and transnational writing development in your teaching or tutoring environment?

Possible Follow-Up Reflecting Questions

1. How have you managed the complexity of multicultural, multilingual settings compounded by issues such as marginalization, postcolonialism, geopolitics, gender, language ideologies, and others?
2. How has your experience working in the MENA writing scene impacted your teaching/tutoring and your research agenda moving forward, fostering multilingual/transactional research tendencies?

The following sections present verbatim responses from each interviewee. The interviewees edited their own responses to meet this journal's editorial guidelines and are listed as co-authors. I then end this piece by reflecting on the relational nature of each interviewee's teaching and tutoring experiences, highlighting how their work in the MENA region informs and challenges dominant U.S. writing discourse. The following interview section explores how writing administrators and educators based in the MENA region contribute to conversations in rhetoric and composition studies and language teaching, both within and beyond the U.S. (Arnold et al., 2018). With a commitment to collective literacy development in the region, MENA writing studies—having originally adopted the writing center as a U.S.-based conceptual model—has since expanded its practices to support writers in other languages as equal stakeholders in their communities, thereby challenging the assumed adequacy of contemporary U.S. writing scholarship in addressing MENA writers' extensive multilingual literacies (Bougata, 2018).

While U.S. writing programs often prioritize English-language processes—despite the presence of institutional foreign-language policies (Lape, 2020)—writing programs in the MENA region adopt pedagogical approaches that are responsive to a multilingual student population, shifting language practices, and locally situated ecologies (Eleftheriou & Sayed, 2025; Salaberri-Ramiro & Zaafour, 2023). Given the region's diversity, these approaches vary widely across institutional and national contexts. Establishing scholarship and research infrastructures such as the MENA Writing Studies Journal can challenge dominant narratives in writing. This article aims to enhance the limited visibility and engagement with multilingual writing ecologies and pedagogical practices from the MENA region. Much of U.S.-based writing studies scholarship is shaped by monolingual assumptions, which often overlook how writing centers in multilingual contexts function not just as support spaces but as sites of innovation. By foregrounding the voices of educators who have lived and worked in MENA writing contexts, this piece disrupts the tendency to view such sites from distant and privileged positionalities, instead centering their situated expertise. I hope the interviews below provide rich food for thought for all writing programs by illustrating how the MENA region enhances writing development through the diverse language lenses of multilingual writers (Zimmerman). This includes exploring World Englishes, recognizing various language varieties and modalities (Akiki and Mehio), and implementing translanguaging approaches (Nish), all while drawing attention to the nuances of local cultures.

Interviews & Responses

In this section, I share verbatim accounts from each interviewee and analyze them in a reflective note after each response. I aim to show how engaging with MENA writing scholars can deepen the understanding of multilingual practices that US-based writing educators often see in their students.

Erin Zimmerman's Response

Every morning, when I left my apartment to walk to the American University of Beirut (AUB) campus, the lovely men drinking coffee on the corner would smile at me and say, “Hi! Bonjour! Keefik?” (Hi! Good morning! How are you?). In Beirut, Lebanon, I could walk across campus or down the street and hear individuals speaking English, French, and Arabic. Sometimes, entire conversations were held in one language; other times, all three languages would appear in the same sentence.

As a monolingual American who studied Spanish through grade school and college, I had a particular view of language learning. I knew folks who spoke another language with their parents, but since they only spoke in English at school, I didn’t have much concept of when and how they learned the language and to what extent it was part of their identity. I knew they had immigrated to the U.S. or their parents had immigrated before they were born. I did not think too much about it; I simply knew that they were bilingual.

In graduate school, I had many conversations about scholarship and practice related to multilingualism because of working in writing centers and teaching composition classes. At that time, terms like native English speaker, English as a second language, and English language learner were prominently used. I also worked in institutions where the few multilingual students were predominantly international students. Those characteristics reinforced my view of multilingualism – that multilingual individuals grew up speaking one language and, somewhere along the way, learned another language, most likely by taking classes in school different than their first/home language.

Living in Beirut changed that. I spoke with AUB students, who told me that they had a difficult time identifying their first language, or L1. All or some of their languages were completely intermixed into their identities: used at home, at school, at church or mosque, and seen on the television and other media. And, of course, they were making hundreds of conscious and unconscious decisions about their language use every day. Because I spoke so little Arabic and French, students and other acquaintances consciously made decisions to speak to me primarily in English. Even so, there were times when another language would slip in. My favorite was the use of the word “bas,” which means “but/only” in the Lebanese Arabic dialect. Many students would regularly use “bas” even when every other word in the conversation was spoken in English: “I really appreciated what this writer was explaining, bas I took issue with their”

After these experiences, I no longer perceived a multilingual student as someone who grew up speaking another language, studied English at school, and then traveled to an English-speaking

country to practice their language skills. This shift has served me well in my current position at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). Unlike my previous U.S. universities, UNLV is regarded for its diversity, and what became immediately interesting to me was the fact that the multilingual students here are more likely to be Generation 1.5 than international students.

Harklau et al. (1999) describe Generation 1.5 students as immigrants who have “traits and experiences that lie somewhere in between those associated with the first or second generation” (p. vii). Generation 1.5 students have typically lived for a significant time within U.S. culture and/or were educated in the U.S., so they have different language learning experiences and needs than international students. These authors observed at the time that most scholarship centered on international students and that many practitioners dismissed Generation 1.5 students’ language patterns as lack of preparation (p. vii). Scholarship in writing center studies still focuses more prominently on international student writers than Generation 1.5 writers; Thonus (2003); Williams & Severino (2004); and Eckstein (2018) are some of few who have considered how writing centers can specifically serve Generation 1.5 writers.

Though not strictly defined as Generation 1.5, my AUB students had language experiences that have helped me re-envision the training I run with writing center consultants. In 2021, Brianne Taormina-Barrientos spearheaded a research project to learn about UNLV’s Generation 1.5 students’ perceptions of our writing center’s services. Using those findings, we designed a curriculum that included discussions of various types of multilingual writers, their specific needs, and tutoring strategies that might best support them.

The training had previously touched on Severino’s (1993) assimilationist, accommodationist, and separatist stances; characteristics of Standard Academic English; and strategies for working with multilingual writers. The strategies we covered were more appropriate for international students or students who learned English as a Second Language. For example, “Don’t underestimate their knowledge of grammar. Since they have learned English, they have been taught grammar concepts and can identify and can differentiate word forms, etc.” and “You may have to repeat yourself more, change your wording, talk slower, or annunciate in order for the student to understand.”

Our revisions highlight the different characteristics of international and Gen 1.5 writers to better guide tutors. For instance, we discuss how some international students know grammatical terminology and rules because they studied those when learning the language; meanwhile, Generation 1.5 writers might be more like monolingual English speakers who learned the language by listening and speaking so do not clearly remember grammatical terms and rules. Similarly, we touch on navigating the resistance international students might give to one-to-one tutoring because it is unfamiliar to them; whereas, Generation 1.5 students might have experienced peer review or similar active learning techniques in their high school settings and therefore appear more prepared to engage in a consultation.

Looking back, it strikes me as odd that I moved to Lebanon to teach writing when I was so uninformed about multilingualism. Working with AUB students helped me shed this naive categorization of students as either native English speakers or non-native English speakers and compelled me to recognize the ways that language learning – as well as speaking and writing with that language – was occurring between and beyond those opposing categories.

Though many of the adjustments I made to my pedagogy probably would not have been obvious to others, I found I was rethinking much of what I had been taught about teaching and tutoring. In my first semester as a writing center administrator, I drew on my own tutor training to instruct my new staff. I had been taught that tutors should only communicate in English with writers because doing so gave them opportunities for language practice. Since I was not fluent in another language, this wasn't a tenet I ever had to question. Within a few weeks in the AUB Writing Center, I began to question it and had discussions about it with my staff. They all believed that shifting between languages helped their writers. As a result, we agreed that the language of the writing (we also had Arabic writing tutors) should be the primary language used in the consultation, but that tutors should use their judgment to switch languages in moments when they thought it would best help a writer learn.

Without that experience at AUB, I would have had a much more difficult time considering the characteristics of UNLV's Generation 1.5 student writers and preparing my staff to work with them. This more flexible view of multilingualism serves me well as a writing center administrator: The central goal I set for my tutors is to help each writer consider their own unique experiences learning to write in order to find the best strategies for moving their writing forward. My new view of language learning means that I conduct training so that tutors are prepared to consider the needs of multilingual students who are not international, which gives them a stronger foundation for building flexibility. At the very least, they are not limited to using strategies that assume a writer's low language comprehension. Having such a deep realization of being unaware makes me strive to inform and prepare my staff to support all the types of multilingual writers they see.

Reflection

As Zimmerman reflects on her efforts to adapt writing center pedagogies to local contexts, she reveals the tensions that emerged when the U.S.-based writing center training models are applied in global settings. Acknowledging the “politics and privilege” embedded in her professional trajectory, she observed how Western pedagogies are often positioned as universal. Her narrative highlights how such frameworks can inadvertently reproduce normative assumptions that do not always align with the needs of multilingual writers. Bougata (2018), drawing on a raciolinguistic perspective, similarly shows how writing proficiency in the Arabian Gulf is often evaluated through the lens of Western standards, shaping how scholars and administrators value local versus foreign expertise. His work underscores the need to center localized knowledge and recognize the socio-political realities and experiential realities that inform writing practices in the region. Zimmerman's experiences in Beirut further informed her development of specialized academic and professional

resources in her current role as a writing center director once back in the U.S. These resources address the needs of international students and Generation 1.5 students across social, pragmatic, and cultural factors. Zimmerman's insights resonated with my own work and experiences as an assistant director of a writing center operating in the U.S., where engaging with global multilingual writers requires ongoing attention to diverse linguistic, cultural, and institutional needs and/or factors that shape one's writerly choices.

Maya Akiki's Response

The MENA region has often been known for its richness in culture. With most of the region situated in strategic locations, it has constantly been considered of significance to many Western countries that continue to assert political and cultural influence in the region. From colonialism to globalization, the inhabitants of the MENA region have adopted, both consciously and unconsciously, the historical, political, and cultural impacts brought forth by mostly Western countries. Today, that influence remains apparent in most areas, but especially in the education sector. In Lebanon, specifically, the vast majority of the locals are at least bilingual, speaking two or more of the following languages: Arabic, French, English, and even Armenian. As such multilingualism, a term that has transcended the limitations of language and has been described as an "intrinsically social way of life and cultural practice" with "sociopolitical implications" (Franceschini, 2011, p. 345) and transnationalism, defined as "forging and sustaining multistranded social relations that linked their societies of origin and settlement (Schiller et al., 1992, ix) have both had a remarkable influence on Lebanese students by shaping their identities as writers. They have as well affected their choice of themes in academic writing, literature and creative writing. In Lebanon, multilingualism has empowered students to access, understand, and integrate the diverse literary traditions they usually encounter in their environment.

Recently, the English language has become increasingly prevalent among Generation Z and Generation Alpha due to their continuous exposure to technology and social media. However, its prevalence does not necessarily ensure its dissemination in the rigor and richness required for academic study of any kind, which I have seen firsthand. This is increasingly common among Arab international students who often come to us through the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) program at LAU. These students generally come from a high school that exclusively taught—save for a few miscellaneous classes every once in a while—in the country's most common language, and more often than not, it is Arabic. Students who receive the MEPI scholarship generally come from underprivileged socio-economic statuses, which means they do not have the ability to enroll in expensive international schools. This is also common among Higher Education Scholarship (HES) students awarded through the USAID program at LAU: these students—as a rule—come from small public schools, and these schools, more often than not, teach in a mix of Arabic and French, do not have the luxury to support their students with their English studies. So, even as these students grow up in this multilingual environment, their serious treatment of the English language on even a pseudo-academic level is virtually non-existent. It becomes abundantly clear that these students are

only exposed to the English language (and, in some cases, multilingualism as a whole) through social media. Therefore, this uncritical and unsupervised exposure to mostly fragmentary and subpar social media English (save for a few considerable exceptions), albeit helpful in the initiation phases of English language learning, quickly loses value. There is a dearth of vocabulary and sustained grammatical structure, such as is found in novels and essays, that makes social media vis-à-vis English writing a double-edged sword.

Moreover, the challenges are common among students, faculty, and administrators. It is obvious that students are not completely prepared for academic writing and research, where they tend to translate complex academic ideas, resulting in confusion, misunderstanding, miscommunication, and frustration. In some cases, their frustration may lead to academic misconduct while recently resorting to plagiarism and AI tools, specifically in their major courses. As a result, the role of the English department and the Writing Center as service units has become of utmost importance for the administration and faculty. The Writing Center has always been considered a safe haven for students. As a coordinator, I often receive frantic emails from students asking about the services due to an issue they faced in class. I make it a point to meet with them and have conversations about writing, after which I refer them to a tutor that I consider would match their “vibe.” For instance, a Lebanese-Armenian student once walked in the center. One could tell she was of Armenian descent based on her accent. She told me she had issues with “thinking in English,” so I figured it would be similar to my students who “think in Arabic” while writing. A tutor at the center who was also of Armenian descent smiled her biggest smile and invited this tutee to sit with her. I no longer understood what they were saying as that musical yet fully strange language filled the room. The only words I could make out were “critical analysis,” “transitions,” and “guidelines,” and I assumed they were discussing the prompt. Despite my cluelessness, I decided to observe the session. From the context, I could tell that the tutee could express herself more freely, knowing that the tutor could tell where she was coming from. The tutor listened carefully and asked her how she felt about the writing and the feedback she received. My tutor, a big fan of Stephen North, said: “It is not about this assignment; it is about you as a writer.” The tutee nodded as if having an “aha” moment and proceeded to read her writing. Then, I heard the tutor say: In Armenian, that works because [mumbles in Armenian], but in English, the phrase cannot work that way. I admit I asked her about some of the things they spoke about after the session; otherwise, I would not have had any clue. The tutor then explained to me that the tutee was overall frustrated. She felt her writing was misunderstood, and the tutor pointed out the social aspects and differences in language requirements and connotations between Armenian and English. It was very clear that the Armenian student was working hard to score a decent grade on her assignment, but she could not promote her ideas with clarity due to the language barrier. She was so down, demotivated, and anxious. The session at the center gave her the boost she needed to overcome writer’s block and start writing confidently. I still remember when the Armenian student returned to the center two weeks later with a smile on her face and a box of chocolate. It was her way of celebrating the moment with the Writing Center team.

Meanwhile, the writing process can be challenging as an English instructor teaching different courses in the sequence. Most students find it very frustrating every time I press the start button. Even though they are well equipped and prepared to write, their worries and concerns start to surface. As such, I keep on encouraging them to think in the target language and to produce simple ideas that can be elaborated. For example, I always remind students to “Keep It Short and Simple” (KISS) in order to avoid confusion and ambiguity. They are also advised to avoid translation and to focus on the use of concise English language. They usually address their ideas in groups and receive peer feedback before they start drafting their essays; this social space usually empowers them and helps bridge the gap between those who “Write” and those who “Can’t Write”. Since I believe in the Writing Center tutoring approach, I always assign conferencing sessions to students, listen to their writer’s voice, and provide constructive feedback for improvement. In these sessions, I meet with students individually and adopt the Socratic Method approach, a form of cooperative dialogue to promote critical thinking and critical literacy. By offering conferencing sessions, students communicate their ideas orally to overcome writing frustration. I am fond of conferencing, which is one of the best formative assessments since it provides an individualistic approach to students’ learning and allows me to reflect on my teaching methods and practices. I believe the process will be complete once students revise their work and polish their final product by trusting their ears while reading aloud and identifying their odd-looking words, phrases, and expressions. So far, these strategies are very successful because they help students develop their pieces of writing in the English language confidently and with style.

As a language instructor and Writing Center coordinator, I learned that teaching language and writing should be engaging, creative, and based on strong foundations. In addition, the process requires clarity in communication, tangible guidelines, and being a compassionate listener.

Reflection

Akiki describes multilingual writers’ academic and social lives at her university, noting how colonial histories shape writers who operate across languages and modalities. She also argues for centering writers’ everyday language practices and engagements as a key focus of writing center research in the MENA region. According to her, in multilingual writing environments, writing centers can function as experimental spaces where writers’ linguistic repertoires and intellectual trajectories are recognized as central to meaning-making and knowledge production.

In this way, Akiki extends Banat’s (2018) call to understand writing as a social practice and builds on Bou Ayash’s (2019) critique of monolingual frameworks, which challenge what she identifies as the “linguistic myopia” of dominant writing instruction (p. 35). As an administrator of a multilingual writing center in the U.S. South, I find Akiki’s framework particularly generative for my writing center practice. Her emphasis on dialogue across global writing center contexts highlights the importance of sustained engagement with colleagues and scholars working in different linguistic and cultural environments.

In my own work with multilingual writers, such exchanges are crucial for understanding how shifting linguistic, cultural, and institutional dynamics shape writers' rhetorical choices. For my own writing center practice, Akiki's perspective opens up several possibilities. These include examining the social positioning of English varieties within specific regions, engaging with non-alphabetic and multimodal literacies, and developing intercultural and intracultural pedagogical materials that reflect the lived experiences of our writers. It also requires critically rethinking writing center research practices, ethics, and institutional missions to better support writers navigating complex global and postcolonial realities. These efforts aim not only to provide academic support but also to activate and sustain writers' diverse literacy practices.

Marwa Mehio's Response

Teaching in the MENA opens up particular linguistic, ideological, and contextual considerations. My teaching has moved me around the region, from Lebanon to the UAE and Turkey. My pedagogical approach has been influenced primarily by my own education and teaching career in Lebanon and then expanded by the other contexts I moved to. While I turn to strategies for engaging multilingual students and tools for enhancing their learning based on their educational backgrounds, my main concern has been student agency. Working with students in Lebanon, I noticed early on that some tend to believe that they are "bad" writers and that "good" writing is elusive, often citing the idea that only Shakespeare can get an A on a paper. Some also seek to follow strict guidelines for effective writing, such as using longer and more complex words to make the writing more sophisticated. There was a desire for perfection and native fluency that upon investigation, seemed to stem from a belief that English is the only path to success and that any reliance on other languages they spoke would weaken their writing. These beliefs are common worldwide, though problematic and rooted in unequal power dynamics, and moved me away from goals of literacy that are rooted in less rigid and more critical ideologies of language. To address these ideologies and work with students to challenge them while also developing academic literacy, I needed an approach that responds to their educational and ideological backgrounds.

I consequently worked to localize pedagogical methods in relation to the tools used but also the content of the course by focusing on ideological and historical factors influencing students' education. I first understand agency through Canagarajah's (2004) definition, not only as having a voice or choice in learning but as students' capacity to influence their learning and the world around them. From there, I approach teaching as a method that not only helps students achieve the direct practical learning outcomes of a composition course, but also critically interrogate the ideological factors and power dynamics influencing their learning and use of English in any capacity, as well as their attitudes toward the language, its value, and their positioning as users of academic English.

This transformative pedagogical method draws on Kumaravadivelu (2003) who argued that language and literacy classes need to design methods that resist pedagogical traditions that reinforce colonial ideologies and the world order. Indeed, we often reinforce such power structures even as instructors

considered nonnative speakers in non-English-speaking contexts through the ideologies we pass on in our teaching, whether intentionally or not (Kumaravadivelu, 2016). In Lebanon, these include such ideologies reinforced in many schools as the supremacy of English as a language for education and advancement and the irrelevance of Arabic (Orr & Annous, 2018). Such ideologies do not only denigrate local languages and cultures but also shape students' agency in using the language. While they may become fluent in English and experts in writing academically, using these literacies within these structures that promote native speakerism and superiority means they may never feel fluent enough, believe that other languages and literacies in their repertoires are not useful, and blindly accept what they are taught instead of "bring[ing] their native cultures and languages into language classrooms and negotiat[ing] with the dominant (competing) discourses" (Liu & Tannacito, 2013, p. 359). By creating our own methods, we can begin to transform these ideologies and encourage students' agency as writers and communicators.

In my teaching, I address these ideologies head-on, having discussions about the attitudes students have toward language, the ideologies they believe and see around them regarding language and language speakers, what it means to be an English speaker, etc. We also interrogate the origins of these beliefs, the value of each language and how it can be used, and the ways in which some values and ideologies are rooted in racial and cultural superiority. To do this, I adopt a postcolonial critical pedagogy, as it focuses not only on the role of the individual in their learning, their agency, and their transformative potential, but on the structural and historical factors informing the circumstances they are in, the ideologies surrounding them, and the language and its power (Kubota & Miller, 2017; Zembylas, 2018b). I reference the work of educators in the region, such as Akar (2016) and Zakharia (2017), who describe ways of localizing critical pedagogies which, though "critical", often do not align with local ways of knowing and may reinforce similar oppressive structures and ideologies.

In Lebanon, for example, I took into consideration the colonial and divided history of the country, the role of language in creating a multicultural and fragmented society, and how these issues intersect in the composition classroom. I found myself going down the path of peace education and exploring how a postcolonial approach (Zembylas, 2018a) can actually be adopted in a composition class, reinforcing the learning outcomes but also creating space for students to use language with authority while interrogating their understandings of peace. Through a postcolonial perspective, students interrogate concepts of peace and plans for social cohesion that are outlined by those in power or international organizations and are influenced by global definitions of peace that often do not reflect reality or the desires and needs of people (Zakharia, 2011; Zembylas, 2018a). When students are given the tools, they begin to investigate these concepts through the language used, the histories behind them, and the power that informs them. They also use language to discuss and redefine what peace means to them and, in this way, they develop their agency surrounding peace itself and the language they are using to communicate it. Through these negotiations, students begin the work toward transformation and change, starting from the classroom, and then in their communities by rejecting understandings of peace that are imposed and developing their own

through discussion and dialogue. When these conversations happen, they contribute to my own continuing transformation as an “unfinished” instructor, in Freire’s (1998) words, and give hope in a context that is sometimes seen as hopeless.

The purpose of these methods is to allow students the space to come to their own understandings, interpretations, and uses for academic English on their path to becoming agents of their writing and communication. The goal is not to villainize English but rather to help students learn the literacies they need in order to become successful while putting their use and value into perspective and understanding the structures and histories that inform this value. While I developed this approach in Lebanon, I have adapted it to other teaching contexts as it depends on students sharing their beliefs and experiences and developing the discussion from there. I have worked with students to understand the context, students’ backgrounds and beliefs, and the ideologies that surround their learning, in order to work with them to develop their agency. My research has also focused on pedagogies that can enhance agency and work toward transformation, and the ways in which they can be localized, such as critical pedagogies and peace education as well as understanding the contexts I am working in by exploring language ideologies.

Reflection

As an applied linguist by training, I saw the value of Mehio’s observation that writers’ deliberate focus on semantics and intentional meshing of languages offers an opportunity to explore various language representations and practices among writers from postcolonial territories. Mehio also illustrates how writers engage with the language of colonizers as a sword against it or employ their language practices as markers of cultural pride and identity. Together, these examples present the ideological dimensions of language practice, rendering everyday participants “transcultural and translingual” (Bou Ayash, 2013, p. 98) within a sociolinguistic landscape.

Mehio’s insights serve as a decolonial pedagogical inspiration and linguistic representation for writing teachers, particularly those working in second-language writing classrooms in the U.S. As a writing teacher from another postcolonial country in the Global South, one of my key takeaways from Mehio’s work is the importance of establishing practical pedagogical and andragogical writing goals that seriously consider and address important aspects of language and their possible connections to writers’ country of origin, race, citizenship(s), and immigration. I felt motivated to brainstorm ways to incorporate other languages into my writing classrooms and to discuss impactful, inclusive methods for learning and utilizing languages based on the linguistic assets that writers already possess. I found this emphasis on critical thinking in language production, especially from the MENA region, intellectually stimulating for my student writers as well as for the teachers, tutors, and administrators with whom they engage in institutional contexts. This encourages students to develop a critical approach to language rather than viewing it through a hierarchical lens. It also provides practice-based professionalization tenets for writing teachers and scholars of the West.

Jennifer Nish's Response

Working at the American University of Beirut (AUB) pushed me to embrace accountability, reciprocity, and expertise in my teaching and research. Reflecting on my experience in Beirut has highlighted the importance of:

1. Supporting multidirectional relationships between writing programs outside the U.S. and those within the U.S.
2. Analyzing types of authority and expertise to value or make space for different sources of expertise in program administration and teaching.

I directed the Communication Skills Program at AUB for a year and a half, starting in my second semester as an assistant professor, which was a very fraught experience. My experiences have taught me that rhetoric and composition as a field needs to engage more fully with the globalization of higher education, exemplified through things like branch campuses, American-style universities outside of the U.S., transnational accreditation processes, and transnational flows of people and resources (such as faculty, students, money, and knowledge) in connection to higher education. I draw inspiration from activists (INCITE!, 2003) who use “community accountability” as a framework for understanding how people in a community are responsible to each other and can respond to harm and violence without relying on police or prisons. WPA work is enmeshed in institutions and formations (universities, academic disciplines) that produce, contribute to, and/or are complicit in structural and epistemic violence. Therefore, WPAs and graduate programs in Rhetoric and Composition need to foster (more) accountability between (a) writing programs and the communities in which they operate, and (b) writing program work taking place within and outside the US. The latter is especially important when writing program work involves the exchange of knowledge and resources between institutions that have transnational power and privilege (e.g., U.S. universities with resources and power that come from U.S. imperialism and colonization, directly or indirectly) and people who are marginalized and oppressed within these same violent systems. Examples of these resources and power include U.S. land grant institutions that profit from stolen Indigenous lands (Goodluck et al., 2020); U.S. universities that partner with the U.S. Department of Defense; and university funds tied to systems of violence, such as military violence. Campus movements in solidarity with Palestine that call for divestment, for example, highlight the ways that structures such as university endowments and institutional partnerships can involve transnational power and violence. Education and knowledge production have also been directly and indirectly tied to colonization and imperialism (Chatterjee & Maira, 2014; Vora, 2018).

US graduate programs need to integrate transnational approaches to rhetoric and composition, and particularly to think about how they are preparing graduate students who will increasingly need this knowledge. Many students earn U.S. graduate degrees and then go on to faculty or administrative positions in other countries, work at/with branch or satellite campuses of U.S. universities, engage students from diverse countries in undergraduate and graduate courses, and develop research and

consulting projects that require ethical engagement with differently-positioned people and institutions. There is a strong history of transnational work in U.S. rhetoric and composition scholarship, including work that explores writing programs and their work in many different places, but I don't think that work is as central to the field as it should be (i.e., in research generally or in graduate education).

My experience at AUB also helped me engage more responsibly with culture and multilingualism in my teaching. AUB students have an incredible amount of linguistic and cultural knowledge that I wanted to invite in and value in the classroom. Transnational and multilingual approaches were not an emphasis of faculty in my graduate program, so despite my interest in transnational feminist theory, my coursework and dissertation did not connect transnational feminist theory to composition pedagogy. When I started at AUB, my syllabi, readings, examples, and classroom activities were heavily based on my US-oriented training and background. I wasn't able to learn enough about Beirut, Lebanon, or AUB before I had to start work, so I created opportunities to learn from students within and alongside the syllabus and readings. I did my best to learn and educate myself alongside my teaching because my training in transnational feminist scholarship and practice emphasized the ways that knowledge and practice are shaped by local cultures, histories, and political contexts and therefore the same phenomenon manifests differently in different contexts. As an educator, I wanted to bring localized readings and examples into my courses as soon as possible, but I had limited time and energy. The best approach I could find was to position my courses as a space to which everyone brought knowledge and expertise – me about the fields AUB had hired me to contribute to and the students about approaches to rhetoric, writing, feminism, and activism (topics emphasized in my courses) from their communities. If I struggled to find locally relevant readings, I tried to develop assignments or lessons that engaged with the gap between our context and the reading.

Once, at a post-panel Q&A on transnational American studies at AUB, scholars and audience members discussed how syllabi convey a particular way of thinking or prioritize some types of knowledge. For example, if students always learn about marginalized people and knowledge as a unit or a set of readings that are added on to one lesson or unit, or toward the end of the syllabus, they may not have the time and space to integrate that learning as thoroughly as something that's introduced early on or often. If a course is structured as a chronological introduction to a topic and the earliest lessons focus on a time period when the scholars writing and publishing were mostly cis, straight white men with class privilege teaching similarly-positioned students, the earliest anchors that students have to try to make sense of their emerging knowledge privilege a particular, limited worldview. This challenged me to think about how I incorporate different topics into my syllabi and find approaches that would provide a more diverse set of entry points or theoretical anchors throughout. For example, if students need to be introduced to histories that are exclusionary, I might pair older texts with more recent ones that offer commentary or perspective on that history. I also often incorporate genres other than textbooks, peer-reviewed journal articles, and books in ways that fit with the theme or approach of the course. Although this work started with my attempts

to make sure my teaching was relevant to students in Beirut, it has been central to my development of undergraduate and graduate courses at my subsequent jobs at Texas Tech and Michigan Tech.

Reflection

From Nish's response, I gathered that when Western writing theorists attempt to construct theories about institutional practices in the MENA region without lived experience or historical association with those spaces, they risk doing a disservice to the region's complexities and local knowledge. For Nish, such outsider perspectives often stem from limited exposure to colonial histories and local contexts, leading to analyses of writing tendencies based on cursory observations. As a result, these analyses frequently overlook the inherent cultural and place-specific differences that define postcolonial spaces. Nish highlighted that institutionalized writing initiatives often operate under Western ontologies and axioms. I agree with her suggestion that readers engage with the culture of these institutions if the goal is to foster genuine educational collaborations and ethical initiatives that allow scholars to "learn from the diverse writing practices and pedagogies in the region and [spark] interest in transnational collaborations" (Arnold et al., 2018), rather than a spirit of 'conquering and changing.' Another key theme in Nish's response is the commitment to observing differences in languages and other literacy practices in the region as an ethical approach to interpreting the targeted writing culture. In short, Nish implies that there is no singular understanding of the MENA writing space; writers bring diverse histories and literacies that shape their work.

While managing a writing program in Beirut, Nish highlighted areas in U.S. writing scholarship that, until recently, have often been overlooked, as also noted by Arnold (2016). Nish pointed out that institutions and programs frequently neglect the effects of globalization, focusing instead on the local US without also considering the very dynamics that shape the teaching of writing beyond the Western world. Drawing on her engagement with diverse communities and complex social dynamics in the MENA region, Nish emphasized the potential of transnational feminist writing research to foster more equitable and globally aware practices. In my own writing center work, Nish's perspective has encouraged me to continue incorporating global Anglophone writing perspectives into tutoring and pedagogical conversations. Doing so allows the writers I work with to engage with a wider range of linguistic and cultural perspectives, while also creating space to reflect on how their own language practices and identities shape their writing. In this sense, Nish's insights not only critique existing gaps in writing scholarship but also inform how I, as a writing center WPA, continue to adapt my practice to better support multilingual writers in the US, being mindful and alert to writing studies work outside the US.

Conclusion

Suresh Canagarajah (2018) reminds us that “translingual is not about using language to conform to dominant meanings, conventions, contexts, and social relationships” (p. 43). Considering the importance of the above orientation seriously, in this piece, I have examined how writing pedagogies are shaped by specific linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical contexts, particularly within the MENA region. Through interviews and reflective engagement with participants’ narratives, this article has put U.S.-based writing center practices into dialogue with multilingual writing contexts beyond the United States. I hope this approach was helpful in revealing how writing programs in the MENA region function as sites of linguistic negotiation, relational pedagogy, and locally grounded knowledge-making, and challenging the assumption that U.S.-based models are universally applicable. The findings from interviews underscore the need for U.S. writing programs to move beyond monolingual frameworks by more intentionally engaging with multilingual writers’ lived experiences, expanding the range of texts and literacies valued in writing instruction, and recognizing the situated expertise of educators working across global contexts. By foregrounding these perspectives, I aim to contribute to ongoing efforts to reimagine writing center work as transnational, relational, and responsive to the complex realities of multilingual writers.

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“I Was Interested in Learning English but not Study It”: Two Case Studies of Saudi Arabian Developmental College Writers

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ABSTRACT

Given the importance of metacognition (i.e., learners’ knowledge of their cognitive processes) in L2 development, and because rhetorical grammar raises writers’ awareness of the connections between grammatical structures and their rhetorical purposes, this study is grounded in a dual theoretical approach: metacognitive rhetorical grammar. To examine the benefits of this approach for multilingual writers’ grammatical automaticity (i.e., ease of use), I conducted two case studies of Arabic L1 developmental English L2 writers in the United States to address two research questions: (1) How do multilinguals’ individual differences, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and self-concept, shape their engagement with metacognition? (2) When multilinguals are not capitalizing on metacognitive opportunities, can explicit grammar instruction facilitate the automatization of rhetorical grammar in their writing? This study employed textual analysis of participants’ Literacy History questionnaires, metacognitive exercises, and writing produced throughout the semester. The findings indicate that integrative motivation, when coupled with instrumental motivation, shaped metacognitive practices differently than instrumental motivation alone. Additionally, explicit instruction shows promise in facilitating the automatization of rhetorical grammar. Pedagogical implications are discussed.

Keywords: metacognition, rhetorical grammar, automaticity, individual differences, developmental L2 writing, motivation

Literature Review

As a multilingual writing instructor of multilingual students, I often feel conflicted about grammar instruction in the classroom. I suspect that many instructors who teach multilingual writers face a similar dilemma: on one hand, students identify the necessity of grammar instruction, requesting instructor feedback on their grammatical concerns; on the other hand, explicit grammar instruction and feedback are not automatically internalized or transferred to students’ future writing. As instructors, we often wonder how multilingual students’ might intuitively and fluently integrate grammar instruction into their writing. Despite broad consensus that L2 implicit knowledge develops acquisition (Rebuschat, 2015, p. xvi), defined as “intuitive,” “automatic,” and “not verbalizable” (Ellis, 2008, p. 418; Dalili, 2013, p. 3), there is no consensus on how such knowledge is achieved (Rebuschat, 2015, p. xvi) or the role of explicit “conscious” and “verbalizable” knowledge (Ellis, 2008, p. 418; Dalili, 2013, p. 3–4). There is further disagreement concerning the role that explicit knowledge plays in L2 performance automaticity (Pawlak, 2021), referring to “the speed and ease with which we carry out... tasks” (DeKeyser, 2001, p. 125). For example, Krashen (1981) advances the non-interface position, which denies any role for explicit knowledge in spontaneous L2 performance (Rebuschat, 2015) and argues that explicit L2 knowledge cannot be transformed into implicit L2 knowledge. Pedagogically, the non-interface position promotes a focus-on-meaning approach that discourages attention to form-based instruction, prioritizing fluency over accuracy (Dalili, 2013, p. 7). However, this position has been heavily criticized by proponents of both the strong and weak interface positions, who argue that explicit rule presentation and form-focused instruction support L2 grammar acquisition (Dalili,

2013, p. 10). The strong interface position holds that L2 learners must explicitly and consciously learn rules through instruction and error correction, and that repeated practice converts explicit knowledge into implicit knowledge (Dalili, 2013, p. 11). Continued exposure to rules through instruction supports automatization, transforming learners' knowledge of *what* to knowledge of *how* in L2 performance (Dalili, 2013, p. 12). In other words, automatization occurs gradually through prolonged, systematic practice, with repeated retrieval and deployment of L2 knowledge supporting the transition from explicit to implicit use (DeKeyser, 2003, 2007; Williams, 2012). Pedagogically, L2 instructors holding the strong interface position use a focus-on-form approach, which is critiqued for its emphasis on grammar drilling rather than "meaningful learning" (Dalili, 2013, p. 13).

Conversely, the weak interface position argues that converting explicit to implicit knowledge results from rule presentation, taught structures, and "gap noticing" (Dalili, 2013, p. 11-14), in which students detect discrepancies between the input they receive and their own output (Ellis, 1997). Thus, automatization occurs when learners' explicit knowledge of the *what* transforms into implicit knowledge through formal instruction, and subsequently the *how* through language use (Dalili, 2013, p. 14). Pedagogically, weak interface advocates promote a focus-on-form approach, drawing learners' attention to specific linguistic forms within communicative, meaning-based instruction, where repeated exposure allows learners to induce and internalize L2 rules as patterns in the input (Dalili, 2013, p. 16). A comprehensive review of the evidence favoring the weak interface over the non-interface and strong interface positions is beyond the scope of this article. I ground my pedagogical approach in the weak interface position given the evidence favoring it over the non-interface and strong interface positions (see Dalili, 2013). Nevertheless, my students' "inert" knowledge (Larsen-Freeman, 2003; 2015), or inability to apply explicitly taught L2 grammar rules during communication, remains challenging. I wondered whether IDs, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and self-concept, affect how students exploit the learning potential of a written task.

Learners' (IDs) in cognitive and motivational factors play an important role in L2 learning. Gardner's motivation theory, for example, distinguishes between integrative motivation – affective, interpersonal, and tied to positive attitudes toward the L2 community – and instrumental motivation – practical, utilitarian, and linked to concrete benefits (as cited in Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, p. 75–76). Furthermore, learners with clear goals, intrinsic interest, and positive self-efficacy are more likely to notice gaps in their knowledge and engage in problem-solving that promotes language acquisition, whereas those lacking motivation may complete tasks without deeper cognitive engagement (Kormos, 2012, p. 399). Learners' perceptions of past experiences shape their future actions, and their self-perceptions inform their motivation (Guan et al., 2024, p. 4). Self-efficacy and self-concept are precursors for learners' motivation. Self-efficacy refers to learners' perceptions of their ability to perform a task and is future oriented. Self-concept refers to learners' perceptions of their self-worth based on past learning experiences; it is retrospective (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Kormos, 2012). As precursors for learners' motivation, self-efficacy and self-concept determine the extent to which L2 learners exploit a writing task to create opportunities to learn L2. Thus, L2 acquisition requires increased intrinsic motivation and a future-oriented, positive belief in one's ability to perform tasks. However, "very few studies...have considered the extent to which

motivational factors influence how students exploit the learning potential of ... written communication tasks" (Kormos, 2012, p. 400). Even with this gap, I was unconvinced that students' lack of motivation was the only factor preventing them from engaging cognitively and applying the rules in the written tasks and, thus, considered other grammar learning strategies (GLS).

The GLS domain examines the "deliberate thoughts and actions that students consciously [employ] for learning and getting better control over the use of grammar structures" (Cohen & Pinilla-Herrera, 2010, p. 64). Learners intentionally choose and apply these strategies in specific contexts to develop self-directed, autonomous L2 grammar, enhancing both immediate task performance and long-term learning outcomes (Oxford, 2017, p. 244). One prominent strategy is metacognition, defined as "one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products, or anything related to them" (Flavell, 1976, p. 232). More specifically, metacognition is "knowledge of cognitive tactics," "procedural knowledge to enact [those tactics]," "conditional knowledge about occasions to enact [those tactics]," and "knowledge of task parameters and self-parameters" (Winne & Perry, 2000, as cited in Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, p. 164), which fosters intentionality and perseverance in learners. Additional factors such as language proficiency and bilingualism influence metacognition; L2 learners with high proficiency use more metacognitive strategies than their low proficiency counterparts, and bilinguals use more metacognitive strategies compared to monolinguals (Raoofi et al., 2014). Thus, creating opportunities for multilingual students to implement metacognitive strategies is beneficial. Though metacognition typically predicts L2 performance (Raoofi et al., 2014), most scholarship has focused on reading and speaking performance, rather than writing. While Schoonen et al. (2011) examined the relationship between metacognition and writing, they did not address grammar specifically. Moreover, how metacognitive processes support the automatization of grammatical rules remains unknown.

When a learner is aware of the cognitive tactics of using structures for rhetorical purposes (i.e., rhetorical grammar), ways of applying those structures, and the conditions that deem those structures effective, that learner is engaging in metacognitive knowledge. In other words, rhetorical grammar instruction offers students opportunities for metacognition as they deliberately consider (and apply) grammatical structures, with effective communication in mind. Furthermore, rhetorical grammar helps writers effectively communicate their intended meaning, raises their awareness of the intended audience and of the connections between form and meaning, and "encourages students to experiment with language" (Micciche, 2004, p. 722). Scholars advocate for using rhetorical grammar to raise writers' awareness of the connections between grammatical structures and meaning in relation to audience and purpose (Kolln & Gray, 2013; Micciche, 2004). Similarly, a creative writing scholar employs rhetorical grammar in workshops to help writers recognize the "tools" available for finding focus, controlling emphasis, and making meaning in their sentences (Salvatore, 2021, p. 91).

Despite all these benefits of rhetorical grammar, particularly its basis in metacognitive knowledge, rhetorical grammar is not widely used in multilingual writing classes. Nevertheless, it served in my

classroom as the core focus of my multilingual instruction, raising the question of how best to implement it. I ultimately paired explicit rhetorical grammar instruction with metacognitive activities, guided by research suggesting that explicit instruction can influence unconscious L2 knowledge, thereby accelerating and enhancing acquisition (Marsden & Slabakova, 2018, p. 154).

Despite the metacognitive essence of rhetorical grammar, no scholarship has examined how or whether rhetorical grammar supports the automatization of rules in English L2 learners' writing. Therefore, I wanted to understand whether explicitly teaching rhetorical grammar sufficiently supports the automatization of rules in English L2 learners' writing. Furthermore, I wanted to evaluate the benefits of engaging students in *additional* metacognitive tasks, and the extent to which their IDs affect how they capitalize on those tasks.

Thus, my research questions were:

1. How do multilinguals' individual differences, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and self-concept, shape their engagement with metacognition?
2. When multilinguals are not capitalizing on metacognitive opportunities, can explicit grammar instruction facilitate the automatization of rhetorical grammar in their writing?

To answer these questions, this study examined a pedagogical intervention in an English L2 developmental writing course I taught in Fall 2019 in the U.S., focusing on two critical instance case studies (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010) of the Arabic L1 learners from the MENA region.

Method and Methodology

Institutional and Pedagogical Context of the Study

Thomas Jefferson University (TJU) is a four-year private university located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with a sizeable international student population. According to the International Admissions office, the university attracts students from the MENA region, including Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. At the time of participant recruitment, students were awarded the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM) scholarship.¹

Participants were recruited from an Introduction to Academic Writing course for English L2 writers at the developmental level at TJU. The course has no prerequisites and introduces international and

¹ was valid during the recruitment of students for this study. Due to the recent termination of the program, the Saudi Arabian student population has drastically declined. The International Admissions office added that SACM was replaced with a more rigorous program called The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Scholarship Program, which is "geared to sending students to the top 125 ranked U.S. universities. As Jefferson is not ranked in the top 125, we do not qualify" (S. Iseminger, personal communication, October 21st, 2025). In its efforts to attract international students, the university is "under contract with INTO University Partnerships which does have a recruitment agent network in the [MENA] region" (S. Iseminger, personal communication, October 21st, 2025).

multilingual students to academic writing. The class consisted exclusively of multilingual students and met twice a week for 2.5 hours over a 15-week semester.

The pedagogical approach I independently piloted in this course drew on Oxford et al.'s (2007) explicit deductive L2 learning framework, in which learners focus on the grammatical structures being taught in relation to their rhetorical purpose and challenge themselves to employ those structures in their own writing (p. 127-129). I used rhetorical grammar, metacognitive activities, and both directive and facilitative feedback to increase L2 writers' syntactic complexity and promote grammatical automatization.

The course textbook was Kolln and Gray (2013)'s *Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects*. In line with Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis, I explicitly taught rules so that learners noticed the L2 grammatical structures. For example, students read short sections, located the rules, and verbally articulated their rhetorical value to hopefully, use the rules in their subsequent writing.

I assigned four essays: (1) a Reflective Narrative examining students' experiences as writers in their L1 or L2; (2) an Extended Definition in which students explained a term from their L1 to a monolingual English speaker; (3) a Reflection on Genre Translation, in which students selected a genre text they composed in their L1, adapted its conventions for an American audience, and then composed an essay reflecting on how audience awareness shaped their writing; and (4) a Comparative Genre Analysis wherein students compared and contrasted the conventions of a genre in their L1 context with its counterpart in an L2 context (see Appendix B for prompts).

To add another metacognitive component, I asked students to write a cover letter (CL) for each of the four projects. These CLs asked students to identify two newly acquired rules, articulate their understanding of those rules to self-evaluate their comprehension, and create opportunities in their writing where applying the rules would help them communicate their intended meaning. I encouraged them to use the textbook for rule retrieval. Having learners engage in metacognitive strategies allowed them to "look[] for opportunities to practice grammar structures" (Pawlak, 2018, p. 360). Thus, learners reflected on both their explicit (deductive) knowledge (as they showed their understanding of the rules in the CLs) and implicit knowledge of grammar (as they produced said rules in their writing). I designed these metacognitive activities to tackle learners' fears of making mistakes.

The Study²

The data included two critical instance case studies of the only two Arabic L1 Saudi Arabian students enrolled in the course: Fatima and Khaled (pseudonyms). This approach involves "examining a

² I received approval for my study (project #7610) from Thomas Jefferson University's Institutional Review Board and data collection took place in Fall 2019.

situation of unique interest with little to no interest in generalizability” (Becker et al., 1994–2023) and responds to calls to move away from quantitative, generalizable descriptions of language learning strategies (LLS) and toward qualitative methods that better capture contextual richness and variability (Woodrow, 2008). Furthermore, this approach allowed me to shift the focus away from theoretical generalization and instead foreground the questions that emerged during data analysis, as well as those that point toward future research. Although focusing exclusively on Saudi Arabian learners limits generalizability to other populations, it reduced variability related to learners’ L1 backgrounds, such as the influence of different first languages on L2 performance. Moreover, my understanding of Arabic and shared background as an L1 with the participants was advantageous in my role as the primary investigator and data analyst since it enabled me to draw on my understanding of the language and its structure.

This exploratory study does not reduce Saudi Arabian students to a fixed set of IDs or make generalizable claims. Instead, it identified traits that emerged from the data and situated them within the specific group of learners and instructional context in which they were observed.

Data Collection and Analysis

Since I was the principal investigator and class instructor, the consent form made it clear that participation was not mandatory, and signed forms remained in a sealed envelope until after final course grades were posted. To achieve interrater reliability, a research assistant, Shreya Shah, and I read and analyzed the data³. Shreya was trained to 1) understand the rhetorical rules taught and 2) conduct textual analysis to trace said rules and calculate their frequency for both case studies. Over one semester, I met with Shreya every two weeks for 75 minutes per session to compare the results of the data analysis and reach consensus, ensuring that all rule application instances were accounted for.

How Research Questions Were Addressed

RQ1: How do multilinguals’ individual differences, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and self-concept, shape their engagement with metacognition?

To address this question, I examined participants’ stated motivations for learning English and their persistence in applying the grammatical structures identified in their CLs. First, I analyzed participants’ responses on the Literacy History questionnaire (Appendix A) that they completed earlier in the semester to identify IDs, including stated motivation, self-efficacy, and self-concept.

I then calculated the normed frequencies of rule application after metacognitive reflection across the four essays using the equation:

³ The Honors Institute at TJU offers full-time faculty the opportunity to mentor students under the Honors Research Assistant Program, whose goal is to provide honors students the opportunity to learn from faculty engaged in academic research.

$$\text{Normed frequency} = \frac{\text{Raw frequency}}{\text{Text length}} \times 1000$$

where 1000 words is the standard reference length.

These normed frequencies elucidated whether automaticity of explicitly taught rhetorical grammar structures occurred (and persisted) post-metacognition in the CLs. Specifically, I distinguished between rules applied only in the corresponding essay, indicating momentary use, and rules consistently applied across essays, suggesting automatization and integration into the student's rhetorical repertoire. Line-by-line textual analysis located each instance of applied rhetorical rules and traced them back to the rules articulated in the CLs.

RQ2: When multilinguals are not capitalizing on metacognitive opportunities, can explicit grammar instruction facilitate the automatization of rhetorical grammar in their writing?

To assess automaticity, the speed and ease of rule application, I calculated the normed frequency of each applied rule, including those not identified in the CLs. This allowed me to distinguish between rules applied with articulation in the corresponding CL and rules applied without prior articulation. The latter suggests that metacognition was not essential for automatization, pointing instead to other factors such as learners' proficiency levels or prior knowledge.

Findings

Analysis of the First Case Study⁴

Literacy History

In her responses to the Literacy History questionnaire (Appendix A), Fatima provided her TOEFL and IELTS scores.⁵ She indicated that before being admitted to TJU, she attended an English Language Institute (ELI) for four months, which offered six levels. She placed at level 3. After completing the ELI, she took the IELTS multiple times before ultimately achieving a score of 7 overall (6 on the writing section). She also took the TOEFL iBT, scoring 78 overall (19 on the writing section). Upon admission, she completed a placement test, which assigned her to my class.

Table 1 describes the IDs that emerged from Fatima's Literacy History: self-concept, self-efficacy, and instrumental motivation.

⁴ Access to the complete dataset of both case studies is available on IRIS upon request

⁵ International students must score at least 79 on the TOEFL iBT or 6.5 on the IELTS for admission

Table 1. IDs and Evidence of IDs in the Literacy History of First Case Study

Individual Differences	Evidence of IDs
Self-concept	<p>“Because English courses in our schools, in my opinion, were not advance and good as they should be, I did not have that much of experience.”</p> <p>“The shock that I faced in the university because of the English made me to really think to master this language. So here I am.”</p> <p>“The summary writing [is the most difficult] because I should restate a good piece of writing by using my own words. I also feel I can not”</p>
Self-efficacy	<p>“I am more familiar with formal writing due to the type of schools I went to. I have been writing in formal about a year and a half”</p> <p>“I started learning English when I was 19 years old—when I attended the university”</p> <p>“Nevertheless, after high school, my journey have started”</p> <p>“...really think to master this language. So here I am.”</p> <p>“...; however, the real start for me in learning the English language was when I came to the United States—one years and a half ago”</p> <p>“And since I came here, I am still working on improving my writing. I am seeing my development. From a person who just knew how to write her name to one who learned to write a whole 4 pages in English”</p>
Instrumental motivation	<p>“If you speak English in Saudi Arabia, that adds a lot to your CV. Also, my future job require learning English so that I can communicate with others over</p>

CLs and Corresponding Essays

Fatima’s first CL showed not only her awareness of the rhetorical purposes of the rules, but also her clear rationales for choosing the rules. She incorporated the two rules, “show, don’t tell” strategy and short sentences, accurately in the corresponding essay, with normed frequency of 5.2 and 1.3, respectively.

Other rules that Fatima applied in the first essay without acknowledging in the corresponding CL included: complex sentences (14.4), compound sentences (10.4), conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases (10.4), and time frame shifts (6.2).

Fatima’s second CL identified the em-dash and semicolon as the rules she incorporated in the corresponding essay. She incorporated both rules, each at a 2.6 normed frequency. She indicated

using the semicolon "to show the logical connection between two independent sentences," and she also used the semicolon in a sentence using "however" as a conjunctive adverb.

The rules that Fatima applied in her second essay without acknowledging them in the corresponding CL were: conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases (17.1), parentheticals as nondefining relative clauses (7.9), time frame shifts (6.6), and compound sentences (6.6).

Fatima's third CL identified three rules: there-transformation, parentheticals as non-defining relative clauses, and the "both...and" correlative conjunction. In the corresponding essay, she used there-transformation at a normed frequency of 3.6, parentheticals as non-defining relative clauses at 5.4, and the "both...and" correlative conjunction at 1.8. Fatima's use of there-transformation reflects both an understanding of the structure and its rhetorical purpose. Fatima's use of parentheticals as non-defining relative clauses was also accurate; in the CL, she clearly identified the rhetorical purpose of the two commas: to emphasize "the additional comment." Finally, the "both...and" correlative conjunction was applied accurately, and its rhetorical purpose was correctly articulated in the CL.

The most prominent rules that Fatima applied in her third essay without acknowledging in the corresponding CL were the time frame shifts rule (normed frequency of 18.0), complex sentences (12.6), and conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases (12.6).

Fatima's fourth CL articulated two rules: the colon to create a list, and the known-new contract "to strengthen the cohesion among the sentences." She applied the colon and the known-new contract at 1.1 normed frequency. Neither the colon nor the known-new contract rule was applied in any of the previous essays.

Other rules that were applied in the fourth essay without being acknowledged in the corresponding CL included: conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases (21.3), the passive voice (11.2), and parentheticals as nondefining relative clauses (8.9).

Analysis of the Second Case Study⁶

Literacy History

In his responses to the Literacy History questionnaire (Appendix A), Khaled provided his TOEFL and IELTS scores.⁷ About a year before the study, Khaled took the IELTS twice, scoring 5.5 on both attempts. Realizing that most U.S. universities require a score of 6 or higher for admission, he enrolled in an English Language School (ELS) which offered twelve levels, typically completed at one level per month. Placing at level 4, he spent eight months completing the program. After finishing

⁶ Access to the complete dataset of both case studies will be available on IRIS upon request

⁷ International students must score at least 79 on the TOEFL iBT or 6.5 on the IELTS for admission

level 12, he submitted his graduation certificate to TJU, which required him to take a placement test; the results placed him in my class.

Table 2 demonstrates the IDs that emerged from Khaled’s Literacy History: self-concept, self-efficacy, integrative motivation, and instrumental motivation.

Table 2. IDs and Evidence of IDs in the Literacy History of Second Case Study

Individual Differences (IDs)	Evidence of IDs
Self-concept	<p>“Before I came to America, my English was so bad.”</p> <p>“I remember when I was in ELS, we wrote an problem solution essay. Problem solution essay is one of the most difficult essays I have ever wrote. Because first you have to find a problem. Then you need to find a solution. After that, you have to object their solution. I remember I got a bad grade on this writing”</p> <p>“In ELS, there are many kinds of essays. For example, classification essay, problem solution essay, and other kinds that I don’t remember. However, we had never done informal essay”</p>
Self-efficacy	<p>“I started studying English in a English school. I have spent 9 months studying there. I graduated from ELS on 19th of August”</p> <p>“Once I had the chance to study in America, I accepted it without thinking”</p>
Integrative motivation	<p>“Speaking of studying English, I’ve been studying English for 2 years. However, I was watching English movies since I was a child. So, I was interested in learning English but not study it”</p>
Instrumental motivation	<p>“One of my dreams is to graduate from America. So, the main reason I’m learning English is to graduate”</p> <p>“Once I had the chance to study in America, I accepted it without thinking”</p>

CLs and Corresponding Essays

Khaled’s first CL identified “show, don’t tell” and time frame shifts as the rhetorical rules used. He clearly explained the rules, and stated that “show, don’t tell” made his writing “more interesting” and allowed him to “increase the length of [his] essay.” He added that time frame shifts allowed him to distinguish past events from facts. In the corresponding essay, he applied “show, don’t tell” at a normed frequency of 2.7 and time frame shifts at 8.1.

Other rules that Khaled applied in the first essay without acknowledging them included: conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases (12.1), complex sentences (10.8), and compound sentences (5.4).

In the second CL, Khaled reflected that he "used some rules in [his] first draft without thinking about it. It was kind of neutral [natural] thing." Those rules included the following: compound sentences (7.3), the colon (6.1), and ordering a series (1.2). His rationale for the "ordering a series" rule, was, "'the far it's [it is] the less important it's [it is]," which is the opposite of what this rule does—indicate an increase in importance. In this CL, Khaled also added two newly applied rules: correlative conjunctions (e.g., not only...but also) at 3.7 normed frequency and versatile verbs at 1.2. Although the 'not only...but also' structure was not used: "Not all the people respect mothers because of the culture, some people respect them because of the religion," his rationale was accurate: "to emphasize the rule [role] of religion." As for versatile verbs, he changed 'get' to 'obtain,' stating that the latter "is more meaningful" and that he changed "the basic verbs that I used to verbs that have more meaning. In other words, I used more academic words." However, the corresponding essay presented no additional versatile verbs.

Khaled also applied rules that were not acknowledged in the corresponding CL, the most frequent of which were conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases (14.7), the passive voice (8.6), and complex sentences (4.9).

Again, Khaled's third CL identified not only rhetorical rules that he was implementing for the first time but also rules from earlier CLs that he found himself continuing to use. The rules that he was implementing for the first time were power words and known-new contract. His rationale for implementing power words was to stress the adverb and the verb, and his rationale for the known-new contract was to add cohesion between his sentences—a struggle area for him. His rationales in this CL were accurate. In the third essay, he used power words and known-new contract rules, each at 3.7 normed frequency.

The rules that he found himself continuing to use from earlier CLs were compound sentences (9.4), parentheticals as nondefining relative clauses (3.7), and ordering a series (1.9). Two of these rules, compound sentences and ordering a series, were articulated in the second CL as rules that come to him naturally.

Khaled's fourth CL identified two rules: the known-new contract and the correlative conjunction (not only...but also) rule. These two rules were not new to Khaled: He identified the known-new contract in the third CL and the correlative conjunctions in the second. His rationale for implementing the known-new contract was to create logical connections between sentences, and using correlative conjunctions was to emphasize the words after "but also." Both rationales were accurate. He used the known-new contract at 4.0 normed frequency and the correlative conjunction at 1.3.

Like in the second and third CLs, Khaled listed rules that he “use[s] without thinking:” compound sentences (4.0), parentheticals as nondefining relative clauses (2.7), and ordering a series (4.0). He explained, “they have become a part of my writing.” Those were the same rules he identified as rules he was now using naturally.

The rules used but not mentioned in this CL included: conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases (29.2), complex sentences (12.0), and power words (10.6). Out of these three rules, power words were mentioned in his third CL.

Discussion

RQ1: How do multilinguals’ individual differences, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and self-concept, shape their engagement with metacognition?

Both Fatima and Khaled showed three trends in their use of rhetorical rules: 1) present pre-metacognition and maintained post-metacognition, 2) consistently continued post-metacognition, and 3) used only during metacognition (see Table 3). What distinguished Khaled’s engagement with metacognition from Fatima’s was his persistence in reiterating rules (namely, compound sentences, ordering a series, known-new contract, and parentheticals as non-defining relative clauses) in his CLs and applying them, as he claimed, naturally. That persistence is reflected in the total number of shaded cells in Table 3 (17 cells to Fatima’s 9). Possible interpretations include that the rhetorical value of these rules was clearer to him, that they better aligned with his needs, or that their subjective difficulty matched his competence level.

Table 3. Normed Frequencies of Rule Application of Both Case Studies & Points of Metacognitive Engagement (Shaded Cells)

	Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3	Essay 4
Fatima				
Show, don’t tell	5.2	0	0	0
Short sentences	1.3	2.6	0	0
Em dash	0	2.6	0	2.2
Semicolon	0	2.6	0	1.1
Parentheticals as nondefining relative clauses	5.2	7.9	5.4	8.9
There-transformation	0	0	3.6	3.4
Correlative conjunctions	1.3	2.6	1.8	3.4
Colon	0	0	0	1.1
Known-new contract	0	0	0	1.1

Khaled				
Show, don't tell	2.7	0	0	0
Time frame shifts	8.1	4.9	7.5	2.7
Compound sentences	5.4	7.3	9.4	4.0
Colon	0	6.1	0	0
Ordering a series	0	1.2	1.9	4.0
Correlative conjunctions	1.3	3.7	0	1.3
Versatile verbs	0	1.2	1.9	0
Power words	0	0	3.7	10.6
Known-new contract	0	0	3.7	4.0
Parentheticals as nondefining relative clauses	0	1.2	3.7	2.7

However, this difference in metacognition may also be linked to IDs. Both Fatima and Khaled demonstrated pursuit of competence in their Literacy Histories and shared several IDs: self-concept, self-efficacy, and instrumental motivation. Self-concept appeared in Fatima's disappointment with past literacy resources and in Khaled's frustration with a low grade, while self-efficacy was evident in both learners' pride in their rapid language acquisition. However, one ID distinguished Khaled: integrative motivation. Khaled's integrative motivation manifested in his desire to "learn English but not study it." These observations suggest that integrative motivation may influence multilinguals' engagement with metacognition more strongly than instrumental motivation.

The pursuit of competence is evident in both Fatima's and Khaled's Literacy Histories, and their experiences also illustrate principles of attribution theory. Attribution theory helps explain their motivation by linking past experiences to the dispositions that shape future actions – that is, how they interpreted prior experiences influenced their subsequent engagement with learning (Weiner, 2010, as cited in Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Both self-efficacy and self-concept serve as precursors to their motivation to learn English. For instance, positive self-efficacy was reflected in Khaled's pride in recalling the exact date he graduated from the ELS, and in Fatima's attribution of her familiarity with formal writing to the high quality of schools she attended. Some negative self-concept, by contrast, appeared in Khaled's lingering frustration over a poor grade on a problem-solution essay and in Fatima's doubt in her ability to paraphrase a strong text. Motivational factors shape how L2 learners engage with and learn from writing (Kormos, 2012, p. 390). In this study, Khaled's integrative motivation may have accounted for his persistence in applying and reiterating rhetorical rules post-metacognition, distinguishing his engagement from Fatima's.

RQ2: When multilinguals are not capitalizing on metacognitive opportunities, can explicit grammar instruction facilitate the automatization of rhetorical grammar in their writing?

Both Fatima and Khaled implemented rules consistently—even when they did not capitalize on metacognitive opportunities altogether. Such consistent rule application (see Table 4) provided

evidence of rule automatization by both learners, who were determined to apply rules they were explicitly taught.

Table 4. The Normed Frequencies of the Rhetorical Rules that Fatima and Khaled Did Not Engage with Metacognitively, but Implemented Consistently

	Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3	Essay 4
Fatima				
Complex sentences	14.4	5.3	12.6	4.5
Compound sentences	10.4	6.6	3.6	2.2
Time-frame shifts	6.5	6.6	18.0	6.7
Conjunctive adverbs and transitions	10.4	17.1	12.6	21.3
Passive voice	1.3	2.6	1.8	11.2
Khaled				
Complex sentences	10.8	4.9	7.5	12.0
Conjunctive adverbs and transitions	12.1	14.7	16.9	29.2
Passive voice	1.3	8.6	9.4	5.3

The fact that neither of them referred to those rules in any of the CLs might imply that metacognition does not play a significant role in multilinguals' automatization of rhetorical grammar rules (or at least these two learners). In this sense, explicit instruction leads to rule automaticity, even without metacognition. However, explicit instruction relies on other factors to be efficient. Various levels of grammar rule complexity demand various levels of explicit teaching (DeKeyser, 2003). DeKeyser defines rule difficulty as "the ratio of the rule's inherent linguistic complexity to the student's ability to handle such rule." For example, a rule with an intermediate complexity might be easy for a learner with high language aptitude. For a learner with higher aptitude, instruction may function primarily to accelerate the learning of a rule rather than to initiate learning that would not otherwise occur. By contrast, for a learner with lower aptitude, instruction may not immediately result in acquisition but instead serves to draw attention to form, with the expectation that acquisition may emerge through continued exposure. Consequently, "for one and the same rule, the goal as well as the degree of effectiveness of explicit instruction will vary depending on the *subjective difficulty* of the rule" (2003, p. 331-2). In this case, Fatima's and Khaled's levels of competency could have impacted the effectiveness of explicit instruction. For example, the subjective difficulty of a rule for each of those two learners likely shaped the effectiveness of explicit instruction and both learners' rule automatization. Alternatively, if those rules were part of these learners' prior knowledge (which would disqualify those rules from being included in the CLs), explicit instruction could have helped learners notice the rules, which is vital for L2 acquisition and development.

Conclusions and Implications

The strength of critical instance case studies lies in their capacity to illuminate patterns and insights within a specific context, allowing researchers to explore emergent questions and identify directions for future research. The results of this study suggest that instrumental motivation is most effective when paired with integrative motivation, rather than when it presents alone. However, this raises the question: what happens when a learner lacks motivation? The findings indicate that explicit instruction of rhetorical grammar supports rule noticing and automaticity, as learners consistently and determinedly applied the rules. Yet neither learner took advantage of opportunities to reflect metacognitively on those rules, even when prompted. This leads to further questions about what distinguishes instances when learners engage with metacognition from those when they do not. Possible factors include the structure of the metacognitive task, such as limiting learners to two rules, or not excluding rules already familiar to learners. Whatever the cause, these findings highlight the need for further research into what drives learners' decisions to engage—or not engage—with metacognitive reflection in the context of rhetorical grammar instruction.

Additionally, this study has clear pedagogical implications. As Larsen-Freeman (2015, p. 274) noted, one of the most important contributions of research is to challenge teachers to think differently, experiment with new practices, and make the tacit explicit. This study challenges L2 writing instructors to reconsider the role of explicit grammar instruction in promoting rule automaticity and encourages them to experiment with rhetorical grammar. Rhetorical grammar, by its nature, fosters metacognition and aligns with Micciche's (2004, p. 722) argument that it raises writers' awareness of audience and the ways form conveys meaning, while inviting students to experiment in their writing. Creating opportunities for learners to notice and reflect on language rules is essential: as DeKeyser (2003, p. 317) observed, there is little evidence of learning without awareness. Assigning CLs offers learners a structured way to exercise metacognition, identify gaps in their knowledge, and apply grammar rules rhetorically in context. This study also underscores the importance of harnessing multilingual learners' metacognitive abilities. Finally, understanding learners' motivations is crucial. Tools such as a Literacy History questionnaire (see Appendix A) allow students to share their language learning experiences and inform pedagogical decisions, recognizing that motivations to learn English in, for example, North America, may differ significantly from those in the MENA region.

L2 instructors, whether in North America or the MENA region, can leverage metacognitive rhetorical grammar as a pedagogical approach to enhance students' writing. Rhetorical grammar functions as a bridge connecting audience awareness, rhetorical purpose, and stylistic choices, emphasizing that these choices do not occur in isolation. By incorporating metacognitive activities, instructors provide learners with opportunities to identify both their existing knowledge and the gaps in their understanding. Over time, integratively motivated L2 learners may internalize these rules to the point that their application becomes automatic, as evidenced by Khaled's experience. Of course, integrative motivation cannot be directly taught or instilled through instruction. The

ongoing challenge for educators remains: How can we effectively motivate students to learn, regardless of the subject? Instructors can at minimum recognize and support integrative motivation in their students, building on it to foster deeper engagement and sustained learning.

Future Research

Despite the exploratory nature of this study, it offers valuable insights into the role of metacognition in L2 writing, highlighting a promising area for future research. It would be particularly illuminating to replicate this study in the MENA context to investigate factors that influence learners' automaticity of rhetorical grammar rules. For instance, how might the findings differ if the study were conducted on a larger scale? What role does genre play in the development of rule automatization? How might metacognitive reading exercises support the acquisition of rhetorical grammar? While the findings are not intended to be generalizable, the pedagogical value of integrating metacognitive rhetorical grammar is clear: it provides English L2 writers with opportunities to take risks, experiment with language, and develop greater control over its rhetorical possibilities.

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Appendix A

Literacy History Questionnaire

1. What are your experiences as a multilingual learner of English, such as your English language background and the age (or grade) you started learning English?
3. Before coming to this class, what types of formal or informal writing were you most used to or familiar with? For how long have you been doing this kind of writing?
2. Before coming to this class, how much experience did you have with reading and writing in English?
3. What does academic writing mean to you? What kinds of writing do you associate with it?
4. it?
5. What kinds of writing do you find most difficult? Why?
6. What are your motivations for learning English? For example, do you intend to stay in America or return to your home country? If you intend to return home, would your proficiency in written English help you professionally?

Appendix B

Project Prompts

Project One: Reflective Narrative

Reflecting on writing experiences in your recent past (i.e. high school onward), tell a story about a writing experience that you felt was particularly effective, OR that you felt was particularly ineffective or unsuccessful. Describe the experience in detail and reflect on what made the experience a pleasant one or otherwise.

To help you write, you might answer the following questions:

- What responses from your readers made you feel especially competent or especially inadequate?
- Assuming you're the protagonist/main character, are there any villains or heroes in this story?
- What was the main conflict and what was the main moment of crisis? What was the pinnacle moment of the story? (For example, your teacher called you out in the middle of class, or you failed a written test)

Target Audience

Your audience is me and the rest of the class. This essay will introduce you as a writer to the rest of the class; it will help us get to know each other as writers as we learn to write in this new language of academic discourse. Because we are sharing our writing with one another, please do not write anything you do not want others to read.

Purpose

Since this is a narrative, you are expected to tell a story. A narrative is often used to highlight an important point, prove the credibility of the author, or create an inviting or intriguing point of entry. When you narrate a situation, you tell a story that has a beginning, middle and an end. There are characters, setting, dialogue, conflict and resolution. Many of us are used to stories that move in a linear way through time.

This narrative is also expected to be reflective. In other words, you should think about the story and your experiences in an abstract way. You may have either learned from that experience, or it may have shaped the person you are today.

The required length of this project is 500 words.

Project Two: Extended Definition

For this project, you are to choose one word, expression, or slang term from your first language and explain the different meanings and uses of that term to someone who does not know your first language. To compose a rich paper, your choice of the term really matters; the term needs to be complex, with some cultural value or significance.

Target audience

The audience for this project is somebody who does not speak your first language, but is expected to travel to your home country in the near future.

Purpose

The goal of this project is to educate the target audience, informing them about the various uses and misuses of the term as well as its cultural significance.

To explain a term to someone who does not know your language, you might need to, first, provide some context as to how your language works and why it is important to learn that term. Not only will you need to explain the different meanings of the term, but also who typically uses it, with whom, when they use it, and why they use it.

For your audience, it may also be important to learn when it would be deemed inappropriate to use that term or when they should *not* use it. Providing synonyms and antonyms can help, but providing myriad examples of how to use that term in a sentence is especially important.

The required length of this project is 700 words.

Project Three: Reflection on Genre Translation

This project is two-fold: translation of genre conventions, followed by a reflective essay where you reflect on that translation process.

To get started, you, first, need to pick a piece of writing you have composed recently in your first language. Preferably, such composition should have happened in your home country. That piece of writing can fall under any genre, such as a short academic essay, a poem, a short story, a letter, an email, a graphic novel, a blog, etc. That genre, though, must have an audience other than the self. In other words, a genre such as a personal diary or the like cannot be considered. The target audience of that writing, however, must have been someone in your home country.

Once you have chosen the piece of writing, you, then, need to translate it to an American audience. In other words, you are not merely translating the *language* of the writing into English, but you are also *adapting the genre conventions and the writing context so they would appeal to a North American audience*.

That translation must be followed by a reflective essay in which you explore the changes you needed to make in order for the North American audience to understand the chosen genre. To help you write that reflective essay, you can start by answering the following questions:

- What genre did you choose and what was the context of its composition?
- How did the North American audience expectations as well as knowledge shape your translation?
- What components, such as language, references, examples, tone, organization of document, did you have to adapt to that new audience?
- How did you adapt the purpose of writing that genre to fit the new context?
- What did you learn from that genre translation process?

After responding to the questions above, consider a thesis statement that reflects the central theme of your essay, then think about how you will organize your ideas into cohesive paragraphs. As always, wrap up with a reflective conclusion in order to help the audience consider the big picture.

Project Four: Comparative Genre Analysis

For this project, you are to choose one genre that is produced in your home culture and its equivalent in the United States. Examples of such genres can be romantic comedy movies, pop songs, graphic novels, advertisements, tourist brochures, or any other subgenre that is produced in both cultures.

After making your choice, you are asked to analyze the genre, pointing out the similarities and differences between the genre and its equivalent. To do that, you need to show your understanding of the conventions of the genre and how those conventions vary across cultures. In other words, how do you see the genre conventions transform to meet the expectations of a different audience in a way that also accommodates the cultural context?

The target audience for this project is an American who is unfamiliar with your home culture and unsure how genres change across cultures.

The required length of this project is 800 words.

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Book Review: *An Imagined America: Language, Literacy, Identity, and Coloniality at Syrian Protestant College, 1866–1920*

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Reading Lisa Arnold's *An Imagined America: Language, Literacy, Identity, and Coloniality at Syrian Protestant College, 1866–1920*, I recalled the rhetoric and memes surrounding Colin Kaepernick's protest of police brutality. Kaepernick is a black man who played professional American football, and in 2016, after several unarmed black men were shot by police at different traffic stops, he knelt in protest during the United States national anthem. The backlash across media was that, despite his silent, nonviolent protest, he was still protesting "wrong," and he was framed as ungrateful for his opportunity to play American football. Kaepernick's silent protest revealed his belief in an imagined America that championed nonviolent protest by black men and yet was met with harsh public polemics. In Arnold's account, the first student protest of the Arab region was cultivated by Arab students' own beliefs of their imagined America and was also met with backlash from the (mostly white) American university administration. This rhetoric regarding the right way to protest and who gets to protest is a throughline of Lisa Arnold's *Imagined America*, which illustrates how Syrian Protestant College (SPC) administrations construct a colonizing apparatus through language and how students negotiate their developing identities through written language and desire.

Working in the archives of the American University of Beirut (formerly the SPC), Arnold traces SPC student identity construction through language and literacy practices. As she does this, she calls on composition and rhetoric scholars to recognize that the discipline's roots are built on racist understandings of language and writing and to "delink" our scholarship and pedagogies from its colonial roots and "recognize and value the existence of pluriversal literacy practices and pedagogies in the discipline's history, present, and future" (p. 92). According to Arnold, writing has always been multilingual, and our students have always negotiated their developing selves multilingually. As such, our classrooms and scholarship should enable and champion multilingual possibilities as well.

Chapters one through three frame the discussion in terms of decolonization and translingual frameworks, trace the history of the SPC, and analyze how the SPC created an assemblage of America through its education. She creates a theoretical foundation arguing that writing studies has always been transnational and translingual and claiming that writing studies' lack of investigations into the United States' colonial literacy projects "has worked to conceal and devalue alternative conceptions of" language and literacy practices (p. 13). Arnold spends chapter two revealing the tensions and negotiations of literacy practices in Ottoman-ruled Syria by illustrating how foreign missionaries cultivated what she calls "the imagined America" through literacy education. Here, she frames how United States literacy practices create a colonizing foundation through language. Chapter three continues the background of the SPC as Arnold traces the institution's language policy decisions and the switch from being an Arabic-medium university to an English-medium university by the fall of 1879. Arnold roots this chapter in the claim that Syrian residents were already making language choices between English, French, and Arabic, and these choices signify changing business, education,

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and power models, regardless of administrative decision-making. Analyzing archived documents, Arnold posits the switch to English was successful not only for its ability to “civilize,” but also because it provided a practical solution for the college in maintaining a balance of power that supported the college’s American faculty and administration” (p. 81). Arnold ends this chapter asking readers to consider that if we are truly to be a discipline of social justice, how can we integrate all language practices in our classrooms?

Arnold provides evidence of the multilingual negotiations of SPC students in chapters four and five. She argues the translingual writing and interactions indicate how students are constructing their “imagined America” and their multilingual identities. Chapter four presents artifacts from two protests: the 1882 “Lewis Affair” and the 1909 “Muslim Controversy.” Through these protests, Arnold illustrates how education, mission, and identity collide among trustees, faculty, and students, and how language(s), languaging, and written documents fuel the complexities (and reveal the colonization) of student identity within the transnational, translingual American university. The Lewis Affair protest occurred after the forced resignation of Dr. Edwin Lewis, who was forced to resign from the Protestant college after a pro-Darwin speech. Arnold contends that student expulsion following the student protest in reaction to Lewis’ resignation illustrates a disconnect between the students’ imagined America and the institution’s colonial epistemology framed through literacy education. In chapter five, with the assistance of translators Ghada Seifeddine and Dr. Yasmina Abou Taha, Arnold illustrates how SPC students “composed America” through the analysis of over 50 English and Arabic newspapers found in the AUB archives. She argues language choice and identity forging is evident among students, as Arabic is used to critique the homeland while English is used for neutral statements. French and Armenian are also present in the newspapers of the archives. Arnold indicates that students saw the newspapers as a way to develop their national identity and “speak back to the West” through the promotion of Arabic and the practice of English. Calling back to chapter four, she reminds readers that protest and “speaking back” are practices limited to Americans in the United States, which students become aware of when faced with the consequences of their protest and writing. This furthers Arnold’s point regarding writing studies’ complicity with colonial education. Her argument suggests as MENA and transnational writing faculty, our writing program missions and writing pedagogy philosophies must recognize that teaching English-only writing rules and genres impairs the identity-formation and agency of our students and, as Arnold notes, reinforces the complacency that the transnational university desires.

Arnold’s final chapter draws six conclusions: 1) there are connections between power, language, and literacy education, and our students are always negotiating those relationships both for themselves and for their imagined communities, 2) the weight of English changes based on context, and those contexts can be institutionalized and high stakes, or they can be student-made and unpolished, 3) literacy education has roots in colonialism, and it is a colonizing apparatus, 4) identity is negotiated through language, and this can be witnessed across students and faculty in archival documents, 5) the opportunities (and ceilings) of language learning transnationally, and 6) the negotiation of multiple literacies, despite enacting monolingual policies, indicates agency-driven language choice.

The merits of this text, especially for the region and for transnational writing practices, are twofold: articulating how students voice their concerns regarding education and illustrating the ways students reveal their linguistic choices and compose in a translingual fashion. Importantly, while performing these rhetorical acts, Arnold cultivates the argument that students are also performing through language choice and rhetorical decision-making. As students built their imagined America, they thought they were building the right to protest within an American institution. But the administration had its own imagined America, which manufactured hierarchical power relations between the West and Near East, administrations and students, and native and non-native speakers. The administration's imagined America reminds the SPC student that their multilingual actions are insubordinate at best and uncivilized at worst, no matter how peaceful or rhetorically appropriate. Through engaging with chapters four and five in particular, which showcase student writing, transnational composition instructors and writing administrators can begin to see how multilingual and translingual compositions can emerge from classrooms and extracurricular university spaces.

Arnold's text is a dense, demanding read. She asks her reader to consider the identity desires of the multilingual student, and how adhering to university administrations is reinforcing a colonizing apparatus. By the end of her book, I was left wondering how writing faculty in the region can develop pedagogies in our classrooms and across our campuses that begin to "delink the colonial legacy of English from the history of rhetoric and writing studies" (p. 91). Throughout the text, Arnold points to institutional infrastructure (both domestic and transnational) as a form of soft power which, through epistemological frames of education, dictates language and protest. She is speaking directly to composition theorists when calling on decolonial and transnational theories to discuss language and identity. Practically speaking, I'm left wanting to know more about the transnational, translingual pedagogies I can employ to enable multilingual and translingual writing. How can the MENA writing classroom meet outcomes while promoting the language choices, identity formations, and local community empowerment of its transnational, translingual students? How does encouraging multilingual composing disrupt the colonial project?

References

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Perceptions and Positions of Postcolonial Englishes: An Interview with Aieshah Arif and Sweta Kumari

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ABSTRACT

This interview features Aieshah Arif and Sweta Kumari, writing instructors at New York University Abu Dhabi, in conversation with colleague Marwa Mehio about their multi-year project, *Perceptions and Positions of Postcolonial Englishes* (PPPE). Launched in 2021, the project investigates how diverse varieties of English are perceived, valued, and assessed in academic and professional contexts, with particular focus on the NYUAD campus. Arif and Kumari discuss the project's podcast, its engagement with Kachru's World Englishes framework and its limitations, the implications of generative AI for linguistic identity, and the project's pedagogical interventions with students and faculty. They reflect on their own experiences of linguistic discrimination as non-inner-circle English speakers and describe how the project has initiated shifts in assessment practices, faculty awareness, and student agency across the curriculum.

Keywords: first-year writing, postcolonial Englishes, World Englishes, linguistic hierarchies

The Perceptions and Positions of Postcolonial Englishes (PPPE) project, according to its page on the New York University Abu Dhabi website,

explores the perceptions, positions, placement, acceptability, influence and impact of Postcolonial Englishes. One of the major aims of the project is to give agency, legitimacy and space to diverse student/speaker voices in spoken and written expression. (PPPE)

The PPPE was started in 2021 as part of the Writing, Languages, and Pedagogy Research Kitchen at NYUAD by Aieshah Arif, Neelam Hanif, and Sweta Kumari, instructors in the Writing Program and tutors in the Center for Writing. The project's goals were material, not just conceptual, as the researchers, stemming from personal experiences with language inequity and hierarchy and observing it in their work with the diverse students at NYUAD, aimed to explore these issues through dialogue with "various stakeholders e.g. students, academics, journalists, content creators, speakers and writers of varieties of Englishes" (PPPE). Their end goal, which has been actualized, was a podcast^[1] to share these conversations and potentially pave the way for curricular change.

The result of the project was not just a podcast, which is by no means a small feat, but transformation across their classes, the curriculum, global NYU network, and the disciplinary community, and their own sense of their agency. They presented their work at conferences, but it was the practical component that mattered most to them: to have an impact beyond the academic conversation and

make it a pedagogical one. They were invited to conduct workshops in classes and talk to faculty about their observations and what they meant for teaching in English to a largely multilingual student body at a translingual university. Their observations align with the conversation on Global Englishes and linguistic hierarchies, reflecting the grand diversity of language usage and experience and the significant implications. We can no longer teach to a standard that assumes only one or two varieties of English are “native” and we need to recognize the devastating impact on student confidence and agency that these frameworks have had.

This project is an example of the often unnoticed work, with great transformative potential, that happens in institutions in the region. Through this interview, we invite readers to share in the accomplishments of this project as well as its decolonial pedagogical goals, issues which matter to us as instructors of writing and language as they mean empowerment for students and faculty. We hope through this interview not only to shed light on one of the many projects instructors have initiated often with little visibility but to also encourage conversations and even projects about Englishes, power, and agency among students and other faculty.

Impetus of the Project

Marwa Mehio: Let's start with the project title.

Aieshah Arif: It is Perceptions and Positions of Postcolonial Englishes.

MM: And what does it involve? If you can tell us what are the different parts of it? What is the project?

Sweta Kumari: The project began with very practical observations at NYU Abu Dhabi as writing instructors where the students come from all over the world and from very different linguistic, school curriculum and learning backgrounds. Often in the Center for Writing we would see students coming to us and wanting to polish their English or sort of “fix” their English, and usually these are the comments given by their faculty. And that upset us because, again, these students are speaking English and they are understood well. But at the same time, what does “fixing the English” really mean? And the comments are often very vague. Is it grammar? Is it the sentence? Is it the type and style?

Therefore, with this experience and interest, we came into this project, Perceptions and Positions of Postcolonial Englishes. This project is based on the conceptual and theoretical work of Braj B. Kachru, who is a pioneer in the field of World Englishes. The field initially started to trace how different varieties of English have emerged in the world and what their positionality is, what the power dynamics are, and then how that impacts the individuals who speak Englishes, not just one English.

We took that as theoretical knowledge and theoretical field work, and we tried to apply it to our campus and in the UAE region broadly. We were really interested in assessing what different varieties of Englishes are spoken on campus, used on campus, but also what varieties are really perceived to be the standard or enforced as standard because we are in the academic field and we are also an American institution in the UAE. What does that mean for the varieties of Englishes being taught in class, being assessed in the classroom? But also what do the speakers of these varieties and also the so-called non-standard varieties think of themselves? The perception part of this project very much means how you perceive yourself, your own linguistic identity, and how others perceive you.

Project Goal

AA: In terms of the initial deliverables that we wanted to get started with, the more tangible one was the podcast. And there was not really a key angle that we were going in. We just wanted to know what kinds of conversations were going on about varieties of Englishes in and around the Gulf, and also internationally as well. We had a bunch of interviews with different stakeholders, everything ranging from historical linguists to media personnel to students to peer tutors and a variety of others, talking about different aspects and different ways that this conversation has been panning out, not just in NYU, but also, like I said, regionally and internationally.

The main reason we also wanted to sort of kickstart that conversation was this broader, slightly less tangible goal of decolonizing the pedagogy, because this conversation has been going on for several years now, in the Abu Dhabi context, and especially in NYU Abu Dhabi. But then there was not really enough conversation about how language in itself contributes to imperialist reinforcement of the way that the curriculum is taught, or the way that only certain varieties of English are perceived to be academic or polished or formal or intellectual. So we just thought to kickstart this conversation and see where it would ripple out in a little bit more of a formal way, although it was through informal conversations with different stakeholders.

The PPPE Podcast

MM: So the initial idea was a podcast?

AA: Yes.

SK: We wanted a podcast for two main reasons. One is because we were talking about languages, so unless you really hear how each variety sounds, you don't really get much. That's why the audio part of it was very important. And second, because we wanted to reach out to a broader audience and not just the audience who are academic. If we only publish in a journal and in formal spaces like this, they get confined to some audiences only, and we wanted to widen it

because we were also working very closely with students and people who are non-academic, such as journalists. Therefore, in order to make it widely accessible and because it was about languages, we decided that a podcast is the best medium.

AA: And one thing that we also paid pretty close attention to was to have representatives of as many varieties of English as we could. So the three collaborators who started this project were myself, Aieshah, and I'm from Singapore; Sweta is from India; and Neelam Hanif, who is our colleague, is from Pakistan. And so in the course of the podcast, we ended up speaking to people of at least 40, 50 different varieties of English. So it was great getting a sense of that.

And the reason why NYU Abu Dhabi was a really interesting spot to do all of that is because we're thinking about this world Englishes framework, where there are certain dominant, "inner circle" or "standard" varieties of English, as well as all of these varieties that exist on the peripheries, the outer circle and the expanding circle. NYU Abu Dhabi is a microcosm of that. We're an American institution in the UAE, hosting students and staff and faculty and community members from over, I think 130 different countries, something like that. So because of that, NYU Abu Dhabi became a really interesting space to kickstart some of these conversations, at least for us, because it's replicating the diversity of Englishes around the world. It is an American institution where British and American English are considered the standard or acceptable ways of presenting your academic work when, on the flip side, the actual Englishes that are being spoken on the ground are vast and unyieldingly expansive. So that was one of the main things that we were trying to both ask questions about, but also showcase in the same breath.

Project Participants and Scope

MM: I actually wanted to ask about that. You mentioned interviewing people who are having these conversations. But you also mentioned that you want people to be able to hear the different varieties of English. So what types of people did you end up interviewing? Because of the way you started it, you said it's more about what are the conversations happening, but it seems to have changed over time.

SK: Initially, when we started it, we went with the most accessible people available - with our colleagues, with our students in the Center for Writing, and then we expanded it to also experts who are teaching and writing on these topics. We went to Oxford for a conference, we found historical linguists there, and later found people who were practitioners in the US, academics who are actually involved with terms like linguistic justice and are very deep into this discourse.

But we also talked to journalists because we were trying to include stakeholders from all walks of life such as journalists who are producing the newspapers or media articles in the non-standard post-colonial geographies and nations. We were interested in examining what guides their practice because often there is this tension between wanting to represent the local variety,

but at the same time wanting it to be accessible to a wider audience. So we were interested in what negotiation happens and what guides that negotiation.

Later, we also talked to students and a lot of people on campus at NYU Abu Dhabi, and also within the region because while we were assessing what conversations were happening, we were also initiating these conversations, as often in those groups, in those contexts, they had not really thought about it.

AA: So I think that's how it worked. It's not necessarily that they were having these conversations, as it were. For example, in the context of the historical linguistics, which was our first full episode, we kind of set the narrative. We wanted to start out talking about how linguistics and language and perceptions of these varieties and accents evolved over time, historically, and then move into different ways and applications of it. That also goes for the journalists, I don't think they had necessarily ever thought about what variety of English they spoke.

But then we framed it and tried to give a little bit of context to how the conversations were relevant, not just to their field, but also to the larger discourse that was going on. And we ended up also talking to the different (NYU) campuses as well. So although a lot of our conversations were based at NYU Abu Dhabi, we also spoke to representatives from NYU New York and NYU Shanghai because all of those represented very different demographics in terms of their relationship with English.

NYU Abu Dhabi is a space where English is an official language, but it's not the national language by any means. And so that was a very distinctive conversation in the way that Shanghai, with English as a foreign language, where it was being used to teach, but then for the most part, in the country itself, it didn't necessarily have an established place. And these were also interesting to compare to NYU New York, where English is the medium of instruction and is also the medium of all social interaction, where again, that dynamic and the tension is completely different for somebody coming in as, say, I mean, we don't like to use that, but like a "non-native" speaker or a multilingual speaker of English.

And then the conversations really evolved over time as well, because we started out just finding out what were the perceptions and positions in terms of status and hierarchy. The hierarchies are established by these varieties of English, but over time, these conversations started to evolve and expand. And we started talking to people from different fields as well. So one of the big sub-projects that it also evolved into was *Whisper and World Englishes*, where we were working with oral history archivist, Lauren Kata, at the NYU Abu Dhabi Library Archives. And we looked at this application of varieties of English on an oral histories perspective, not just in academia, because that's also something that is huge in terms of –

SK: – preserving the voices of the people in their own voices.

AA: Exactly, whilst at the same time, addressing a lot of these tensions of hierarchy and stereotype and discrimination faced by the differences in the kinds of English that they speak.

AI and the Whisper Project

SK: And that happened around the same time when the whole world got involved with generative AI technology. We ask if AI is an opportunity or a disturbance or a challenge. Does it completely break apart the world and efforts of World Englishes? Because the efforts of World Englishes has been preserving your voice, your variety, giving that variety equal status and prestige and perceptions. But then came generative AI, which has been described as "flattening" the language. Everyone's writing is now going to sound and look the same, we worried.

And a lot of these conversations were in fact inspired by our conversations with NYUAD Library archivist, Lauren Kata. She was very interested in it because what Lauren was doing as an archivist was recording oral interviews, under the Memory Project, as part of NYUAD archives. She was also involved in transcribing those interviews, so it's during this transcribing activity that she figured that the AI tools such as Whisper could maybe pose more challenges. Even outside of this AI technology, she was involved in training her students, researchers and student assistants in transcribing work. A lot of her work involved actively thinking about how much editing she does and what guides those principles, which is when she reached out to us.

AA: So the questions there were twofold. One, in terms of the AI technology that she was using, which is Whisper, a speech-to-text technology that is used for oral history transcriptions for interviews. And so one of the questions was, when it comes to AI technologies and their transcription capabilities, what are the distinctions between their capacities with regards to varieties of English? Because they did seem to have issues with varieties that were considered to be outside of the "inner circle."

And this might be a moment, which we probably should have mentioned a little bit earlier, to say that also Kachru's World Englishes Model, although it was a start in our theoretical framework, a jumping off point for our research, we did identify a lot of issues with it as well. Like the fact that it doesn't take into account the, first of all, non-geographical boundaries, the fact that it doesn't take into account the power and dynamics, the fact that it's, at the end of the day, reinforcing the stereotypes of what we're trying to avoid. Because the inner circle automatically gets categorized as the "native category," and everything that falls outside of that is not.

MM: But then even spaces like the UAE don't fit in any of the categories, right? Because they're not expanding. It was colonized, but not in the same area. Is it the same as India or Singapore? But then even India and Singapore, that history is very different, right?

AA: Yes, when it comes to Singapore, for example, I have lived my entire life with English as my primary language. I don't even say Native Language. And I consider myself to be completely fluent, but then I would, for example, not be able to get a job in about 90% of these language instruction contexts because their job descriptions require a "native speaker," which I do not fall in, in terms of these World English categories.

So, the way that we were looking at it was also through breaking this assumption of there being a native and non-native dichotomy. The first issue being Whisper's capabilities in transcribing and reading "non-native accents." And the second thing is in terms of categorizing readers. Because for oral archival purposes, you have to give some sort of indicators and markers of like, names, ages, geographical background. And one of the tags that was consistently in the oral history archives was of the "native" or "non-native" English speaker. But then that in itself holds a lot of prejudice and stereotypes immediately.

In-Class Application with Students

AA: The two-fold considerations that we were making were first on Whisper's capabilities, and second on the categorization of the speakers because when these archives are accessed by people from outside, there are labels which carry a lot of weight. Whether you're saying it's a native, non-native, there's immediate pejorative assumptions that pop up as you're reading these labels. So we worked with Lauren on that. That was when we had the conversation about the native, non-native speaker and how to break the binary, proposing an alternative of categorizing maybe as primary and secondary speakers, which we have been testing out during class, working with our students in class.

And that's actually worked out really well because they always pause for a second and they're like, well, yeah, I guess my first language that I spoke was Arabic and I speak it at home, but then I use English a lot more. And so that becomes the focus of the question: What is it that you speak the most? And that's been one of the interesting things that's come out, I feel, from the research because the way that the agency and the self-perception or your ownership over the languages changes your agency and use of the language when you do. And that really applies very closely to how they also express themselves in their writing.

MM: Okay, so you're reframing how you talk about language, and that's reframing how we talk about linguistic identity specifically, and it's reframing how students think about the language, and then it actually impacts the work that they do?

AA: Yeah, it seemed like that, and I think it happened so subtly and so quietly that we didn't really notice it at first. But I feel like this language has rippled out across the entire, at least first year

writing seminar¹, and we're trying to bring it across the campus as well, where there is a decentralized focus on getting this absolute polished or certain "Standard English" presented in the writing. Because why is that necessary when the key purpose is to be understood?

SK: And in fact, I think our project is very timely because in the age of AI flattening all the linguistic flavors and identities, the emphasis on preserving the voice is even more important now. We had already begun emphasizing that your variety of English is also valid, your variety of English tells us what your individual voice is, and what that way of expression is. It's individuality that we want to preserve.

Conversations with Faculty

SK: And when we talk about emphasizing, we also work a lot with Writing Program faculty and then also broadly other faculty and practitioners because sure, you can encourage the students, but if you're not still modifying the syllabus and the assessment, it's not going to go very far. You need to check what you are assessing your students on, especially when it comes to writing, because writing tends to be formal and in the formal language, somehow, if not directly, in subtle ways, you still kind of promote or encourage "British or American, or one of the inner circle" varieties. So we really tried to work with faculty more in the sense of creating awareness, having those discussions, but also really thinking about revising and revisiting your assessment practices. And that started to happen a lot, especially on campus.

MM: So not just in the first year writing seminar?

AA: Yeah, broadly. I think it's because also in our position as writing instructors, we are embedded in the first year writing seminars, but also embedded in the Center for Writing. And because of that, we have a little bit of a reach across the campus. On top of that, we do run workshops for the faculty, and we go into classes for the core curriculum, running workshops there as well. And so there's training that happens on multiple layers there. For us, in terms of having this conversation; for the students, in terms of sort of reinforcing and reshaping the way that their relationship with writing and their linguistic identity is; and also for faculty, because in the way that we speak about writing, we hope that it also promotes a way of thinking about writing and languages that's not unidirectional and also not still accidentally or implicitly imperial at heart.

Workshops and Conferences

MM: You mentioned workshops in the class, but you have done workshops outside to talk about these things? Can you tell us a little bit more about the other workshops and any other things that have come out of it?

¹ The First Year Writing Seminar is the first-year composition class required across all NYUAD students in their first year.

AA: Sure, I'll first talk about the core workshops. We go into classes and work with the faculty in designing workshops tailored on writing or different stages of the writing process: reading, listening, speaking, thinking, everything. And in the process of that, we have tried to fold in these conversations as well. And it's interesting how we're talking about varieties of English, which seems very niche, but then if you think about the fact that we're an English medium institution, and English has become the lingua franca of the world it means that this conversation is actually the basis of pretty much everything. So in terms of the writing that's being produced in class, the communication that's happening informally, the way that we think, the way that we engage, the internet and all of that is still tied to the language that we're working in as well.

We've also attended seven conferences regionally and internationally. Those were really good spaces to bring this conversation out and share with other people. Because we're looking at it also, I think, from a pretty multidisciplinary perspective, being writing instructors and being composition experts. So in the International Association for World Englishes Conference, we brought in this angle of writing instruction and AI. And then for the Oral Histories Conference, we were talking about oral histories from the perspective of World Englishes. So it's really about cross-pollinating the disciplines which are having these conversations (or not having these conversations) to just give them a little bit more access and reach because we work across so many disciplines and in so many different ways.

SK: At the NYU Abu Dhabi campus, there is a center for faculty workshops and faculty training, the Hilary Ballon Center for Teaching and Learning. We have also run workshops a couple of times in that space where usually a variety of faculty from different disciplines came to attend. Writing is at the core of everything. Even though the faculty who are teaching content mostly and don't really think about writing actively, they are still teaching writing or at least assigning writing assessments and assignments in their classes. Through these workshops and conversations, the faculty came to realize how much they could influence student work. And then through students' writing and work, they could also influence general discussions about language identity, linguistic identity, linguistic justice, and even encourage inclusion and empowerment. I think all of this eventually empowers speakers to take ownership of the language they speak and not be embarrassed about committing errors and mistakes.

We have encountered that often on this very diverse campus, the first year students feel very overwhelmed and some of them feel like they're at a competitive disadvantage with the people who have had more exposure or access to English. I do remember one student saying "I feel very sad for myself. American students can access everything very clearly whereas I cannot." In situations like this, we want to let students know that you are equally valuable regardless of whatever language you have access to. And that multilinguals have a variety of linguistic devices that they could use in order to speak with impact using the whole range of their linguistic

repertoire. Sometimes they just don't know that these tools can be used interchangeably and to their advantage. Through these conversations, research and workshops, we try to encourage and empower students. They are certainly not behind if they are not better than a monolingual speaker of English.

Institutional Response to PPPE Interventions

MM: You mentioned the importance of bridging the gap, because you can tell students: you're empowered, the variety of English that you use is valuable, is English, all of that. And you mentioned how it's important for faculty to actually respond to that and not preach it or come to the workshop and then be like, yeah, but I'm still going to put 30% on grammar. What is your approach to bridging that gap, among faculty and students?

SK: NYU Abu Dhabi campus has been very receptive to whatever discussions we have had. We haven't really received strong resistance to this. I think everyone has been very welcoming. The gap sometimes comes into actually implementing that and how much control or even just time and resources you have. I think the intention is there.

We talk about diversity of students, but we also have a great diversity of faculty. The faculty themselves are multilinguals, bilinguals, so they do respect and really admire the fact that we are talking about linguistic variety and linguistic identity and diversity and inclusion in general, but often either they don't have time at hand to do a major revision of their syllabus, or they don't have control over assessment because approvals from many different stakeholders need to be in place. But as much as there is control, I think the faculty is very much willing to adjust.

Since we started to have these conversations, at least in the first year writing seminars and the faculty that we have worked with, the faculty are telling the students actively: look at the grading rubric; I do not grade on your syntax and grammar and techniques. I prioritize your critical thinking, and the weight has been adjusted, or at least it's being adjusted, so it's been very encouraging here on campus.

AA: Two things also. For one, the fact that it's not anything revolutionary, actually, what we're saying, if you think about it. And I think that has been obvious because a lot of times we're like, oh, is there going to be resistance and this and that? But this is the kind of conversation that is like a switch. The second you flip it on and you're aware of it, it's very hard to unsee it. And it's very hard to come back and say no, but I want to reinforce the imperial dynamics that have existed in the world. It's ironic. Because at the end of the day, we realize that the faculty and staff who are more stubborn and more resistant to change, are a little bit more sticklers for this standard English, happen to be the ones from the postcolonial countries. So it's really a mental shift but then at the same time I think, like Sweta said, it's a very receptive campus and space that we are working in.

But then on the other point that I was going to bring up, it was this idea of how the imperial standards that exist are also so tied to a lot of the other conversations that are going on in the world right now. I will not go too much into the political situations, but we mentioned earlier, this idea of AI. And the reason why our project also evolved so much into an analysis and study on AI is because the concerns that are mapped out in our project in terms of varieties of English are almost directly correlating to the concerns that people have with the advent of generative AI. Because if you think about, like we mentioned earlier, this idea of authenticity, your voice, preserving your critical thinking, how do you maintain some kind of an identity in a space where not only is your language being flattened, but your thinking being flattened? And so a lot of that has been in an attempt to empower students and also staff and faculty alike to think about how your agency and ability to govern your own language, your own thought, is also something that appears in your variety of English. Because that's all your individual identity.

This idea of a standard English is very much tied to the professional or academic standards that students are also striving towards in an academic setting. And that's also a lot of the reason why they tend to turn to AI. Apart from not having time or being lazy, there's this desire to fulfill this academic standard, which is very much tied to these imperial standards of academia as a whole. So in order to decolonize the curriculum, we also have to have people decolonize their ways of thinking, including faculty. So a lot of the conversations that we've been having have been trying to have them aware of the fact that there are different ways of thinking about it. And there's also this arbitrary notion of superiority or imperialist supremacy, which we need to break ourselves out of because it's not serving anyone, especially in today's day and age. And that's something generative AI unfortunately is seeking to reinforce rather than break down.

Personal Motive for Project

MM: What is your personal interest in the project? Personally, what brought you to the project?

SK: English is not my first language. I grew up learning English in my later stage pretty much from high school to college. I struggled with the accent and pronunciation a lot. I grew up being embarrassed about some of the linguistic features that were impacted by my first language, which was Hindi, and also due to the regional variety of Bihari Hindi. So it took me years to come to an acceptance that whatever accent or expression or choices I have, they define my individual identity. I don't need to sound like someone else. I was inspired by this personal journey and I wanted to make sure that other speakers, the students who are coming to this very established and "prestigious" university don't get into the same trap.

I feel like with my positionality now as someone who kind of feels a little more empowered to own my language, I have some negotiation power when it comes to linguistic discrimination. For example, my most recent win is fighting with a European university where I got admitted into a master's program, and it took me many emails and a lot of strong statements explaining

why I should not have to write the IELTS. By default, any “non-native” or “multilingual” student has to somehow provide proof of English proficiency if they want to go further in higher education. I, as someone who has been practicing teaching in an English medium university for over a decade, having to prove my English abilities was offensive. I, in fact, used this project as justification for why I didn’t need to take an IELTS test again. They finally accepted that, so it was such a great win personally, and I feel like people who have come through this linguistic complexity and identity and perceptions now have a position to fight for it. We should continue to fight for it. Had I not done this project, I don’t know if I could really stay firm in my decision not to retake the IELTS test.

AA: And that's what I was actually going to say. I did have a thing to add because one of the big things as I was growing up, you take your language for granted. But then at the same time, I think I was first confronted by it when I was applying for an MFA in creative writing and they insisted that I do TEFL, English as a foreign language test. Although I had submitted a 20-page manuscript of my writing in English, and I had been accepted, they insisted that I submit this in order to start with the program. And I did eventually do the test, but then I didn't do the program because I was like, I can't support this. And on top of that, when I was looking for jobs, when I first graduated, and I realized I couldn't apply for so many of them because I was, “non-native,” it was this deep sense of injustice that I think fueled me to think about it a little bit more. And honestly, I wish I had the project back then, like a decade ago or whatever it was, because I would not have caved. And the fact that I did cave still kind of stings for me. And I would love to spread the word enough that if it can be one less person's fight, then I would have succeeded in some way.

At the end of the day, it's like, you also know that language is power and it is a tool of those in power. So I think it's a great spot that we're in right now because I feel like we're at a point in history when all of the systems in power are being questioned systematically and may eventually be disestablished or dismantled. But I feel like language is one big one that I feel like that has been under a lot of scrutiny recently. So I think our work is really timely in that sense, both in terms of its importance in general, in terms of a globalized world, but also the political situation, and also with generative AI.

Resources Supporting the Project

MM: What material and non-material resources that you have, like financial, but even support, do you feel like there were elements that here kind of helped you actually do this project?

SK: I think the Arts and Humanities Research Fund was such a great resource because, how much research you can do without the actual funding, right? And they were very supportive.

AA: And also giving us access. Because when it comes to things like conferences, I don't think we would have been able to do that by ourselves. And this allowed us to speak to some of the

people that we did, great members of the community, including the wider international community, not just the ones at NYU Abu Dhabi.

SK: And especially because of our rank as instructors, right? Often in many institutions, these kinds of research funds are only reserved for faculty positions, but here they were very inclusive, and they let us drive this project. This was the only project that had instructors only, not even another faculty as a dedicated member, so it was great support and encouragement.

And as we said, in general, whoever we have spoken to, whether it was faculty or program heads or directors, they were all very receptive. And in fact, we were asked to present our work to the provost office research forums in NYU New York and Shanghai, and so whoever we have reached out to either to be our guest or to talk to or support our project, they have always been very supportive and encouraging.

AA: And I think it's also great because the research itself, one of the things that we were very resistant against was doing research for research's sake. And that was also why we didn't want to do a paper. Although we eventually did some writing, as a main output, we didn't want these conversations to be just reserved to academic journals because it's such a practical and tangible subject. And I think the reason why it's also been really rewarding for us is because like I said, it's not just research for research's sake. We are applying it every day in our work. In our work with the students, our work with the faculty, with the staff, with the entire community, and also how we live and advocate for ourselves and for other people as well.

Future of the Project

MM: What do you plan to do in the future with this project?

AA: We've been working on the project for about four years, and the key thing about the project is that we started out intending to have conversations and expand the conversations. And because of that, although there hasn't been a distinct starting point and a distinct ending point or specific outputs that we wanted to produce apart from the podcast. We have followed the trail of where the research has led. And so, now, at the moment, we've done a lot of work with AI and putting in conversation this aspect of World English, varieties of English, and AI in instructional spaces, but also outside of that. So that seems like the spot that we would go in, and I'm interested in continuing to pursue that line of reasoning because obviously the question on AI is only going to keep evolving. And that, in conversation with World Englishes, varieties of English, and AI in instructional spaces, but also outside of that.

SK: In the four years, we have also had some tangible outcomes, like this podcast, the whole series is going to live and hopefully have a ripple effect and perhaps have more collaborations. We also wrote a book chapter, for teachers, on how to incorporate World Englishes and AI into teaching.

It's an instructional book. It's going to be published soon. We also conducted several workshops and presented at conferences. These were really great conversations. And for our podcast, with season one finishing, the project came to a natural pause, we are now at the stage of rethinking what the next focus and goal are going to be.

Final Thoughts

MM: Is there anything you want to add at all?

AA: Thank you for having us on here, and also thank you to all of the people who have made and the project possible apart from the resources from Arts and Humanities department, the amazing, amazing people we spoke to, and all of the guests who were so receptive because I think having the conversation is the first step to making some sort of change. And the fact that people were actually open to having the conversation and rethinking how they do things, which they might do very much and for a very long time, has been really rewarding. And the fact that we see that spill over to the students is just... [chef's kiss]

SK: And not just that, when we reached out to people to talk to, people listened to us on very different platforms and reached out to us as well. Lauren's collaboration was because she was really inspired, and we had a lot of other faculty reaching out to us from New York.

AA: Teach Talks² reached out to talk about it, and then also now we're expanding to different disciplines and faculties as well, because it's easy to talk about it like in writing spaces necessarily, but then now we are also able to talk about it in STEM, in computing and engineering and the arts.

SK: Something that we didn't quite manage to, but we started with, is to expand this more into other regional institutions. We did run workshops et cetera, but we didn't really get to work more closely with our regional partners, so maybe that's something we can do.

AA: We were thinking of reaching out to the other writing programs and writing centers in different universities in the region to find out more about how the varieties of English work in there and how they're being instructed as well, because I think not all institutions are like NYU Abu Dhabi. But then there's also a lot of teacher training that we imagine might be useful in terms of the framing because, goodness knows, students can do with a little bit more support as well.

Conclusion

The PPPE podcast, and the discussions, workshops, pedagogical interventions, conferences, and publications that have resulted from it are a testament to the often invisible and undervalued

² According to the Teach Talks page on the New York University website, "TeachTalks is a series of interactive, faculty-led programs on teaching hosted by the NYU CTL and its NYU-community partners every semester" (*TeachTalks*).

(Sharp-Ramirez & Kenley, 2025) labor of writing instructors and its impact not only on their classes or departments but across the curriculum. It also demonstrates the breadth of impact when institutions are receptive to the input of writing instructors and programs, valuing their work as not only service programs but shapers of the culture of the university and the identities of students at crucial moments in their entry into the program (Russell, 2020). Students in Aieshah and Sweta's classes were involved in conversations on power and language and came to the realization that their "non-native" variety of English was in actuality representative of their voices and empowered by their ideas, rather than inferior due to accent and imperfect grammar. These students' agencies as writers and as learners cannot but have been impacted positively by these identity-shaping experiences, leading to stronger writing and communication not only in the first-year writing seminar but beyond.

The openness to the work they did extended to faculty who themselves are put into boxes based on the diversity of their linguistic varieties not only to discuss the impact of the hierarchies of language on students but on their own work. These are the ways in which the writing program, through the efforts of the instructors, can be part of cultural and ideological shifts in universities (Bernstein, 2010). When they are supported and recognized, their work, which is impactful and important as is, can have further ramifications. In addition to institutional support is maintenance of such initiatives, as they can be transient in addition to being invisible, especially in the region where faculty are constantly changing (Fleszar et al., 2025). Even with the PPPE project, the impact has expanded beyond expectations, but if it is not formalized through changes in policy or curricula, the impact it has had on specific faculty and even programs cannot be sustained. For writing programs in the region, which vary from traditional and reinforcing native biases, to innovative and critical of linguistic hierarchies, changes happening in the moment and on the surface rarely impact the epistemological frameworks they are in, unless they are maintained and recognized as meaningful to how we teach.

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TeachTalks. New York University. <https://www.nyu.edu/faculty/teaching-and-learning-resources/center-for-teaching-and-learning/events/teachtalks.html>

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Special Issue: Call for Proposals

When Mars Attacks: Doing Writing in Times of War

War and “business-as-usual” are not terms that many assume coexist. For those of us unfortunately familiar with such turbulent times, life is often measured by what we can still achieve despite the war, and we have learned not to wait for better days. As such, the reality for those of us teaching in the Middle East and other spaces of conflict requires creating a “business-as-usual” pedagogy, institutional practice, and scholarly output while our colleagues and students are displaced, our neighbors shift to online instruction, and we follow our respective live news coverage. While we are maintaining our survival and ensuring the institution functions, this special issue works to confront our lived experiences in times of war and its effects on teaching and writing.

Writing studies scholars note that language and writing have always been entwined with colonial projects, and therefore war and conflict (Arnold, 2025; You, 2018). While language and writing may be instituted to concretize power and ideology, by nature, language and writing also have the power to adapt across situations and contexts, especially in times of conflict and uncertainty. As writing studies teachers and scholars, we often grapple with language ideology and when confronted with war, the consequences of being part of a soft power apparatus become more immediate and tangible. In this moment, when multiple manifestations of conflict are being fueled by language ideologies worldwide, we acknowledge the multiple and layered consequences of violence, and the ripple effects popping up in governments and classrooms otherwise untouched by war.

Every day is filled with moments we remind ourselves to keep going, and war forces us to acknowledge how deeply embodied our daily academic lives are. Robinson (2006) jokes that as academics we live in our heads. That our bodies are just means of transporting our heads to meetings. We know now that wars force us to acknowledge the embeddedness of our daily practices in the phenomenal world outside of our heads, and that it takes intentional reflection to adapt anew each time we hear drones, explosions, sonic booms, ambulance sirens wailing by and to work with our bodies to yet again write, teach, think.

By nature, writing and composition have the power to adapt across situations and contexts. But it is difficult and exhausting. It may also be punishing for authors if adapting results in resistance to the academic writing machine (Henderson et al. 2016). And it requires a shift of focus, context, and genre to recognize the ways in which we (faculty and students) are mediated by and mediating writing. We also shape our work through a pedagogy of care as we figure out how to adapt our language, pedagogies, and access for our students and (though we often forget) ourselves (Motta & Bennett, 2018). Students and faculty are living without electricity, in tents, with extended family members, with curfews, different time zones, in battle fields.

This special issue, *When Mars Attacks: Doing Writing in Times of War*, invites submissions from war zones and diasporas regarding your praxis, pedagogies, autoethnographies, and theories as you navigate the disruptions of war or the ripple effects and hot spots that follow. We welcome

submissions that explore the broad question of what characterizes the experience of being an academic in times of war.

Topics can include, but are not limited to:

Pedagogy

- War and violence shaping pedagogy and/or writing
- Multiple, overlapping events informing or mediating best practices
- The ways in which connection is built or damaged
- Speaking to our collective trauma in the classroom
- Resistance to personal writing and expressivist process

Institution

- Maintaining practices (tenure/hiring/textbooks/exams) when the practice no longer fits the context
- Disrupting and/or problematizing programmatic building and change
- Concerns about continuity across students, staff, and faculty
- Displacement

Individual

- Students (and colleagues) recognizing that education is the ticket “out” - and what “out” may mean in different Middle East contexts
- Education never fully becoming a ticket “out” and carrying the war with you whenever you go about your new business as usual
- Brain function shifting from large output to small daily tasks
- Changes in our socializing

Ripple Effects and Hot Spots

- Global and local media discourse in narrativizing events, blame, and action
- Our own ethics of representation and language choice
- Other manifestations of conflict and adaptations across outside governments
- Generational effects of multiple wars and overlapping events
- New global conversations and new global relationships

While our journal serves the Middle East North Africa region, we welcome proposals from scholars entrenched in war zones and facing the ripple effects from outside. To that end, we are required to follow the bounds of both American and Lebanese laws. We understand that such content brings anxieties - we are happy to publish under a pseudonym.

Please submit proposals of 300-500 words by June 30th, 2026. We are accepting proposals through outlook forms. Feel free to reach out to menawritingstudies@aub.edu.lb with any submission questions or concerns.

MENA Writing Studies Journal accepts manuscripts written in MLA (9th edition) and APA (7th edition). Our submissions include:

Think pieces (3,500 words)
Full-length articles (7,000 words)
Translingual Literacy Narratives (7,000 words)
Programmatic Interviews (7,000 words)

Our projected timeline for the special issue:

Proposals due by June 30th
Editorial acceptances by July 31st
First draft submitted by January 15th, 2027
Reviews completed by March 31st, 2027
Second drafts submitted by June 30th, 2027
In press by late 2027/early 2028

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Submissions

We accept rolling submissions for full length articles, think pieces, book reviews, literacy narratives, and interviews. Please refer to the [Guidelines for Submission](#)¹ to submit appropriately formatted documents with the cover sheet to menawritingstudies@aub.edu.lb.

MENA-related writing studies research

We are interested in timely empirical research, theory, and praxis regarding writing in the region. While submissions are published in English, we invite articles discussing the theory and instruction of writing studies of any language in the region, at all education levels.

We accept full-length article manuscripts (7,000 words including references) and think pieces (3,500 words including references).

Book reviews

Book reviews of MENA region and global texts fitting the aims and scope of this journal, including multilingual texts on linguistics, composition, multiple literacies, and various ages are encouraged (1,000 to 1,500 words to review a single text and 3,000 to 3,500 to review multiple texts in conversation).

Translingual, transnational literacy narratives

We invite literacy narratives from both students and scholars highlighting the linguistic and composing processes engendered by translingual and transnational sponsors (up to 7,000 words).

Interviews

We encourage anyone working on initiatives that contribute to the goals of furthering collaboration, education, or research in the region—whether small or large scale, inside their classes or beyond—to engage in interviews. (If you or someone you know is doing this kind of work, interview them!)

To document the unique work conducted in each writing program, we publish interviews of faculty, staff, and administrators with innovative writing studies and faculty development projects (7,000 words).

News and Events

MENAWCA was hosted at NYU Abu Dhabi from 9 to 12 October 2025. The *MENA Writing Studies Journal* is publishing conference proceedings with guest editor Anita Moutchoyan, coming Summer 2026.

¹ <https://www.aub.edu.lb/MENA-Writing-Studies-Journal/Pages/Guidelines-for-Submission.aspx>

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at AUB held its annual international teaching conference in April 17, 2026. The *MENA Writing Studies Journal* is publishing conference proceedings with guest editor Malakeh R. Khoury, coming Fall 2026. For more information on the conference, you can email ctl@aub.edu.lb.

If your organization or institution has events or news that you would like shared with *MENA Writing Studies Journal* readership, please email menawritingstudies@aub.edu.lb.

Organizations, Listservs, and other Resources

Our work in the region is not possible without the decades-long commitments from the international writing studies organizations and listserv networks below. To continue the conversation on your terms, we recommend that you engage with organizations and subscribe to the listservs below.

MENA Writing Studies Listserv

The *MENA Writing Studies* Listserv operates to connect regional writing studies personnel across borders and the diaspora. Our goal is to build the writing studies network with regional diasporic conversations, welcoming both formal and informal correspondence. With this network, and in the scope of MENA writing studies, we welcome members to:

- Share the work (research, teaching, and administrating) we are engaged with
- Ask questions regarding local pedagogical and programmatic best practices
- Announce calls for conferences, papers, research participants, and job opportunities
- Share news of conferences, journal issues, and major/master tracks

To subscribe to our listserv, register your email address [here](#)².

MENA Writing Studies Map

This ongoing project started by the *MENA Writing Studies* Editorial Board is a map of the various MENA writing spaces that we work from. It's a map through which we hope to reflect our territory: our institutions, professional activities, and research that we engage in. Please fill out this [form](#)³ to add your program and/or yourself to the map. You can use this [link](#)⁴ to visit the map and see the institutions, activities (journals & competitions), and research interests that have been added. , and we're looking forward to getting to know and collaborating with your writing programs and writing studies activities.

² https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A_lists.aub.edu.lb_www_subscribe_menawriting.studies&d=DwMFAg&c=slrrB7dE8n7gBJbcO0g-IQ&r=-xRJUc4XPjf0ewA9bxEn2w&m=v6_mlnagMnN-detY4iRd8uwpCvK5ZDZWhjpGj6eA4mNzTWZShiaMzrVyfgpw-bk1&s=aX4LqeONJ4jYMxmv1U54DE0GpfxqYgBUXL-ke2I90NM&e=

³ <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe7-54yxhfrvVFOJYQejo8T-NbazQhunRr3CSHRI-gSK4dy9w/viewform>

⁴ <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?hl=en&mid=1RBIIJfMbsLXOPIThHsuamnz8unuHJJ8&ll=33.900453231027214%2C35.4808577384046&z=17>

English or Englishes Podcast

The *English or Englishes* Podcast is developed and hosted by Sweta Kumari, Aieshah Arif, and Neelam Hanif and was developed as part of their project *Perceptions and Positions of Postcolonial Englishes* through the NYU Abu Dhabi Research Kitchens. You can use [this link](#)⁵ to access the podcast on Spotify:

International Researcher's Consortium

The International Researcher's Consortium is a Standing Group at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. The consortium hosts a workshop on Wednesday of the CCCC's and [documents the scholarship online](#)⁶. The IRC also hosts workshops associated with other international conferences such as [EATAW](#)⁷ and [WRAB](#)⁸.

MENAWCA

Middle East North Africa Writing Center Association brings together writing centers, academic support staff, and writing faculty from across the region. A biennial conference is hosted in different countries with timely themes. They also manage a google group to share correspondence regarding studies and calls for proposals. [Ask to join the mailing list through this link](#)⁹.

Teaching Writing in Lebanon

Teaching Writing in Lebanon is a listserv dedicated to news, events, and calls for proposals relating to the teaching of writing in Lebanon. To subscribe to the listserv, [sign up through this link](#)¹⁰ or send an email request to teachingwritinglebanon-request@aub.edu.lb.

Transnational Composition Group

The Transnational Composition Group is a Standing Group with the Conference on College Composition and Communication. The group also has a listserv which shares information and resources regarding transnational and translingual writing practices. To subscribe to this listserv, please send an email to transnationalwriting@fiu.edu, and provide your name and email address along with a request to subscribe.

Writers in the University: Conversations with Scholars Videos

In this set of videos, six faculty members at the American University of Beirut talk about

⁵ <https://open.spotify.com/show/3d5p0wDMk7n2FPsKk6q3SK>

⁶ <https://wac.colostate.edu/community/international-writing-studies/>

⁷ <https://eataw-wa2026.ut.ee/>

⁸ <https://www.isawr.org/writing-research-across-borders-2026/>

⁹ <https://groups.google.com/g/menawca-mailing-list?pli=1>

¹⁰ <https://lists.aub.edu.lb/sympa/subscribe/teachingwritinglebanon>

writing in their academic disciplines, learning to write in different languages, and writing guidance they offer to their students. The project was carried out by John Pill, a language testing specialist, and Amy Zenger, a composition and rhetoric specialist, with the aim of contributing to the teaching and learning of academic writing in the MENA region and beyond. A [project page](#)¹¹ provides information about the development of the videos, which could be replicated in other contexts. You can use [this link](#)¹² to access the videos.

Writing Studies Listserv

The Writing Studies Listserv is a moderated list of international, but predominantly United States centered, news and postings within the composition and rhetoric community. Daily communication regarding job postings, calls for papers, and study participants are circulated. To subscribe to the listserv, follow [the Writing Studies listserv link](#)¹³, and follow the directions.

¹¹ <https://www.aub.edu.lb/writers-university/Pages/Projects.aspx>

¹² <https://www.aub.edu.lb/writers-university>

¹³ <mailto:LISTSERV@LISTSERV.NODAK.EDU>



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